

SAM GOTTESMAN

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



Sam Gottesman, son of Isak and Zseni, was born on October 20, 1923, in Iršava, Czechoslovakia (now Irshava, Ukraine). Sam had four sisters—Hella, Florence, Rose and

Szeren—and two brothers, Jenó and Joshua. As a child, Sam attended public school, and after school he went to cheder to learn Hebrew and about Judaism. Sam had a Bar Mitzvah, and the family attended synagogue regularly. The family owned a hardware store, and he and Jenó worked with their father.

In 1938, as a result of the Munich Pact, Iršava became part of Hungary. Some of Sam's family members were sent to do hard labor. In March 1944, Hungary was occupied by Nazi Germany. Life began to change for Sam and his family. While celebrating Passover, the family began hearing rumors that something was going to happen the next day. The following morning, Sam heard the town crier going from street to street, announcing that all Jewish people had to report to the synagogue courtyard by noon. Once there, the Jews were cordoned off into three streets that had been designated a ghetto. Jews from the surrounding areas were brought to the ghetto. After a few weeks, Sam and his family were sent to a ghetto in Mukačevo, where they lived in the Sajovits brickyard. Sanitation in the ghettos was non-existent, and food was scarce.

From the brickyard, Sam and his family were deported to the Auschwitz camp complex in Nazi-occupied Poland. Sam and his father were separated from the rest of their family. After two days, Sam and his father were sent to Wolfsberg, a concentration camp in Germany. While there, Sam was forced to build foundations for buildings and to assemble barracks; he also worked in a coal mine. In November 1944, Sam was sent to Wüstegiersdorf, a concentration camp in

Germany. He was there until February 1945, when he was sent on a death march to Bergen-Belsen, where he remained for two days. He was sent to Hildesheim, and then he was sent on another death march towards Hanover, Germany. On April 16, 1945, Sam was liberated by the American army.

Sam and his father tried to locate any family members who survived the Holocaust; only one of Sam's sisters, Florence, was still alive. The family eventually settled in a displaced persons' camp, where they contacted a family member in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. They were able to obtain papers and immigrate to the United States. Sam worked and went to night school. Sam began corresponding with Lea Lebovics, a Holocaust survivor who lived in Israel. Sam visited Lea in 1954, and they were married. Lea moved to Pittsburgh, where she and Sam had one son, Jeffrey. When Sam's father died in 1961, Sam first began to process his Holocaust experience, and he sought treatment to help him live with depression. Sam was an active member in the Pittsburgh Holocaust survivor community. He passed away in 2019. This interview was conducted on November 10, 1996, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.