Joseph Kahn was born in Bedzin, Poland in 1922, near the border of Germany. He was 17 years old when the Nazis occupied his hometown in September 1939, which was home to 39,000 Jews before the war began. One week after the invasion, the Nazis burned the synagogue he attended which was two blocks away from his home.

Joseph and his family hid for two and a half days listening to the constant screaming and shooting coming from outside until the militia captured them.

At the end of 1942 Joseph was arrested and transported to a labor camp. As the truck drove away, Joseph’s sister chased after it, screaming his name. The truck turned the corner, Joseph’s sister disappeared from sight, and he never saw her again. Joseph survived several Nazi labor camps and concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Gross-Rosen, Buchenwald, and Dachau, and a nine-day death march in January 1945 through knee-deep snow and bitter cold.

On April 29th, 1945 American soldiers liberated Joseph after they found him lying in a pile of bodies, too weak to move. He weighed only 85 pounds. He then spent from 1945-1948 recuperating in a hospital from malnutrition, tuberculosis, and scarlet fever. In 1950 Joseph moved to the United States with nothing but twenty dollars in his pocket and the clothes on his back. He immigrated to Philadelphia, where his cousin lived.

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Witness to History Project:

The Witness To History Project is designed to further the message and lessons of the Holocaust by direct interaction between students or interested adults and Holocaust survivors. Participants "adopt" a survivor by learning his or her unique account of via listening to the survivor tell his/her story, asking questions, writing a biography, reviewing a videotape, and memorizing and re-telling the story to others. Ultimately, the participant will have the lifelong job of educating others about the Holocaust by sharing this personal narrative. Contact the Holocaust Awareness Museum to participate.