

Berek (Bob) Obuchowski

Bob was born on 28th April 1928 in Ozorkow, Poland. He was the youngest of four children and lived with his two sisters, Gittel and Malka, his brother, Yankel, his parents and his grandfather. They were a religious Jewish family, living a normal and happy life in pre-war Poland.

Bob was 11 when the Second World War broke out. Soon after the Nazis occupied his town, Bob's parents and sister, Malka, were rounded up and killed by the Nazis. His brother, Yankel, escaped to Russia but did not survive. His grandfather was killed in Ozorkow.

After his parents were taken away, Bob and his sister Gittel, lived in a ghetto in Ozorkow, during which time Gittel worked in the town. After three months they were both sent to the Łódz Ghetto, where they remained for over three years. Bob was seriously ill with meningitis, but survived this with no medical care.

From Łódz, Gittel and Bob were sent on cattle trucks to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were separated. He was selected for work with 24 other boys and he never saw Gittel again. Bob was now alone.

In January 1945 Bob was sent on a death march. During the march the temperature was below zero and Bob wore only the striped pyjamas issued to him in Auschwitz. Bob was forced to walk from Auschwitz in Poland to Buchenwald in Germany.

Whilst at Buchenwald, Bob volunteered to be moved to the Rehmsdorf concentration camp. Early each day the inmates had to march 2.5 miles to work. While he was in this camp, Bob broke his foot. The following morning another inmate forced him to go to work. At the time, Bob thought the man was being very cruel but when he returned after the day's work he learnt that everyone who had been left in the barracks had been sent to the gas chambers, so the man had saved his life by making him go to work.

After three months in the camp, as the war was coming to an end, Bob was put on a train to Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia, which was shot at by the allies, forcing the Jews on a death march, few survived. Bob was liberated by the Russian Army soon after arriving at Theresienstadt.

In 1945 the British Government, agreed to allow 1,000 orphaned child survivors of Nazi persecution into the UK, supported by the Central British Fund, now World Jewish Relief. However, only 732 could be found at that time and of these only 80 were girls. They collectively became known as 'The Boys'. Bob came to England on the first transport of 270 boys and 30 girls. They were taken to Windermere in the Lake District to recuperate and for rehabilitation. In his words "From hell to paradise". He then lived in Gateshead for two years, studying more about Judaism. After all he went through, he never lost his faith. During this time he trained as a master upholsterer.

Bob moved to London and met Marie. They later married and had two children; five grandchildren and four great granddaughters. He died in 2014. He was passionate about Holocaust Education and shared his testimony in schools across the country.