

SAMUEL HARRIS



Born: May 13, 1935 (Demblin, Poland)

Interview Date: October 2015

Samuel Harris (born Szlamek Rzeznik) was born on May 13, 1935 in Demblin, Poland. The youngest of seven siblings, he grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and his father was a scribe. After the Nazis invaded Poland, his family was forced to live for three years in a ghetto before it was liquidated in 1942. With the exception of Sam and his two sisters, Sara and Rosa, his entire family was transferred to Treblinka and murdered in the gas chambers upon arrival. Rosa, Sam's eldest sister, was forced to work in a concentration camp outside of Demblin and managed to smuggle Sam and Sara into the camp and hide them there. Rosa devoted herself to protecting Sam and Sara and brought them with her when the Nazis transferred them to a factory in Częstochowa. In 1945, the Soviet Army liberated Częstochowa, freeing the Rzeznik siblings. At the conclusion of the war, Sara and Sam were placed into an orphanage before Rosa arranged for them to be smuggled out of Germany and taken to New York City. Put up for adoption, Sam was separated from Sara and settled with the Harris family in Chicago. After graduating from college, he worked for Equitable Life Insurance, married Janice ("Dede"), and they had two children. Sam played an instrumental role in building the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, including serving as President. This interview took place in October 2015 in Los Angeles, CA.