

Josh Gortler

Video Transcripts

Video 1: Josh Gortler Last time he saw his Grandfather

When the Nazis arrived into Tomaszów, all of us had to leave our homes into the courtyard of the synagogue. My grandfather, as I mentioned, who was the rabbi of the town, was extremely religious, and it came to—in the morning—to say morning prayers, and Jews—Orthodox Jews around the world—even today—put on a prayer shawl and tefillin on the arms and on their head. My grandfather refused to put on the tallis and the tefillin because there were women in the same general area, so he asked the women to leave the courtyard, and of course everybody says, “No, we cannot leave, it’s too dangerous.” So he left the courtyard. That’s the last time that he was seen. The next time people reported seeing my grandfather was hanging from a tree with his feet up and his face down, dead. That is the image that I have of the first days of the war in 1939 in Tomaszów, Poland.

Video 2: Josh Gortler Escape from Poland to Siberia

The part of Poland that we were on changed hands a number of times, between Poland and Russia. And the Russian army came in and out of that particular part of Poland. And one day when they came in, my parents gathered myself and my brother, a few other families, and we escaped from Poland with the Russian army. And we did quite a bit of traveling. Again, the cattle car—cars were the means of transportation that moved us from Poland into Siberia.

Video 3: Josh Gortler Poem

The Jews, after the war, had no place to go. After any given war, there are refugees, but soon, all of the refugees are able to go back to their own homeland. But for the Jew, there was no homeland to go back to. I told you what happened to me when we came back to Tomaszow. Poles did not want us. I think there is a poem that was written at the time, which I like to share, which kind of symbolizes and expresses the feeling—how the Jews felt right after the war in the DP camps.

It is called, *[YIDDISH TITLE]*, *Where shall I go?* I’ll read it in Yiddish and translate it.

[YIDDISH] Where shall I go?

[YIDDISH] Who can answer me?

[YIDDISH] Where shall I go?

[YIDDISH] Every door is closed for me.

[YIDDISH] The world is huge, it's big.

[YIDDISH] For me, the world is very small.

[YIDDISH] Where shall I go?

[YIDDISH] Every door is closed for the Jew.