

USC Shoah Foundation

The Institute for Visual History and Education

Gabriel Neumann

Though he is the youngest child in the photograph, Gabriel “Gabi” Neumann was not spared from the death and destruction of the Holocaust.

Gabi was born in Obyce, Czech Republic, on Feb. 25, 1937, and lived with his parents and older brother and sister. In 1944, the family was deported to the Novaky camp but was able to return to Obyce. The Sered camp opened in 1943, and Gabi’s parents found work for themselves in the nearby village Zamianska Kert, in a farm and a tobacco factory, so they and the children could avoid the camp. However, when the Germans came to take people to Sered, Gabi, his mother and siblings ran to the nearby forest and hid while his father found a different hiding place. Two months later, they were betrayed by people from the village and sent to Sered.

On Nov. 3, 1944, Gabi and his mother and siblings were sent by cattle car to Auschwitz on one of the last transports into the camp. Because the war was drawing to an end, the Nazis did not make selections for the gas chambers and sent Gabi and his family to the “family camp” section of Birkenau. After a week, Gabi, who was six years old, was left in the children’s block while his siblings and mother were sent elsewhere. Children would often disappear from their bunks for medical experiments, but Gabi believes he was saved because he slept near the back of the barrack instead of the entrance.

Except for a daily line-up and one meal a day, Gabi and the others did nothing except huddle by a small oven for warmth. His brother would sometimes visit him and pass sugar cubes through the electric fence that separated their barracks, or they would meet at the fence at night even though they could have been shot. Gabi realized that people who went to the hospital barrack could avoid the line-up, so he pretended to be sick for a time. His sister did fall ill, but joined him in the children’s block after she was released from the hospital.

In January 1945, the approaching Soviet Army triggered the Germans to send the majority of camp inmates on what would be death marches to lands that were still under German control. Gabi and the other children marched from Birkenau to Auschwitz, and made it back even after the Germans who were marching them suddenly disappeared. The Red Army liberated Auschwitz on January 27, 1945.

Gabi says that his mother found him and his sister after liberation from the names of the children in the now-famous Soviet photograph from behind the barbed wire. His father had died on a march from Auschwitz to Gleiwitz, and Gabi’s brother did not survive the war. He immigrated to Israel on a Youth Aliyah program in 1949 and later married, had one son, and became an artist and graphic designer. Gabi died in 2014.