

**Statement of Philip Bialowitz about the Sobibor Death Camp
January 21, 2010**

First I would to thank this court for giving me the opportunity to deliver this testimony. I am here today in the name of the thousands of men, women and children who perished at the hands of the Nazis at the Sobibor death camp. I was born Fiszal Białowicz in a small town named Izbica in Poland. I came from a large Jewish family. But by the time I was a teenager, both of my parents had already been murdered. Then, in April of 1943, I was caught in a roundup in Izbica. I was taken by truck to Sobibor along with my brother Symcha, my sisters Brancha and Toba, and my niece.

Upon arrival at Sobibor, we stepped down from the trucks into an area near the train platform. Several German officers and Ukrainian guards were standing there. A German officer asked if there were any professionals or tradespeople among us. My brother grabbed my hand and pulled me forward with him. He told the officer that he was a pharmacist and I was his assistant. The officer gave his approval, and told us to stand to the side, where several other tradespeople stood. All of the others who arrived with us, including my niece and two sisters, were led away. We never saw them again.

Within hours of our arrival, I noticed that a foul-smelling fog had enveloped the camp. I learned that this fog came from the cremation of bodies. The next day, my brother told me that he found a neighbor from our hometown working in the camp. The neighbor told my brother that he cut the hair of our sister before she went to the gas chamber. Soon I was also forced to cut the hair of women on their way to the gas chamber. Many of these women came from Holland and they appeared to believe that this was a resettlement camp. Before I cut their hair, some of these Dutch women politely asked me not to cut their hair too short. They showed no signs of knowing that they were about to be murdered. Hundreds of women at a time passed through the haircutting shed in this manner. Within minutes of cutting their hair, we heard the roar of a motor, mixed with a horrible mass scream, at first loud and strong, then gradually subsiding into silence. Under German and Ukrainian supervision, I was sometimes forced to help victims off the trains on their way to the gas chambers.

I witnessed many Dutch Jews arriving on trains with bags containing their personal belongings. When I helped these Dutch Jewish passengers with their bags, some of these people offered me a tip for my services. My heart was bleeding, because I knew that in less than an hour they would perish.

One day a transport of passengers arrived in box cars. But when I and several other prisoners opened the doors, we were met by the horrible smell of decomposing bodies. Inside the box cars about half the people were dead and swollen. There were several babies who looked like adults because their stomachs were so large. The people who were still alive were starving and severely deranged. They appeared to have been locked in the cars for a very long time, and were perhaps exposed to poison gas. We began helping the few survivors down from the train. Despite being in such pitiful and helpless condition, they were brutally beaten and shot by several German officers and Ukrainian guards. Next we removed the corpses. I tried to pull a dead woman off from the train, but her skin came away in my hands. I saw another woman with a baby on top

of her. Both were dead and swollen. They were still embracing each other. Today I still have nightmares about this scene.

One day, a German officer and a few Ukrainian guards escorted me and a small group of workers to the nearby town of Wlodawa to dismantle brick houses and bring the bricks back to Sobibor. Being beyond the barbed wire fences of Sobibor, I considered trying to run away. But I was unarmed and I feared that my fellow prisoners would have faced collective retribution for my escape. So I continued to work.

Near the end of July 1943, we heard rumors at evening roll call that several of the prisoners from the Waldkommando had escaped while working in the woods. I was brought to a yard along with my fellow prisoners. Then the remaining prisoners from the work detail in the woods were brought in to the yard. A few were already dead. There were about eleven prisoners still alive. But they were covered in blood and looked severely beaten. Some were shaking. We were forced to stand in a semi-circle around them. SS officer Gustav Wagner announced, "These foolish prisoners tried to escape today. And now they are going to pay for it. There is no escape from Sobibór! This shall be your fate if you do the same foolish thing that these prisoners did." Then several German officers and Ukrainian guards took aim at the eleven prisoners and shot them. The men fell to the ground in front of my eyes.

During the six months that I spent in Sobibor, I experienced many terrible things. I was beaten. I was whipped. I watched my family and friends perish. I often thought about escape. But Sobibor was surrounded by barbed wire, guard towers, a mine field, and the deep forest. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, a wild animal would trigger one of the mines, and we were marched out of our beds and counted like diamonds.

But on October 14, 1943, we staged a successful revolt. A group of conspirators that included me and my brother, killed eleven German officers and several Ukrainian guards. Then, with stolen weapons in hand, hundreds of prisoners rushed toward the barbed wire fences and the mine field that separated the camp from the forest. However, several Ukrainian guards stood in the watchtowers, firing their machine guns. I heard a Soviet Jewish soldier beside me calling out in Russian to the Ukrainians in the guard towers, "Brothers, join us! The war is ending. The Red Army is already near Warsaw. Join us!" But the guards continued to fire their machine guns. Bullets flew past my head. Many prisoners were shot before a few of us silenced the Ukrainians with our own guns. As I climbed the barbed wire fence, my finger was sliced (and the scar remains today). Once we made it past the fence we still had to cross the mine field before reaching the forest. I saw many prisoners around me killed by mines but I somehow made it to the forest. There, I found my brother Symcha and we used a compass to help us navigate through the forest in a direction away from Sobibor. We joined a partisan group in the forest and found shelter with heroic Polish Catholic farmers until we were liberated by the Soviet armed forces.