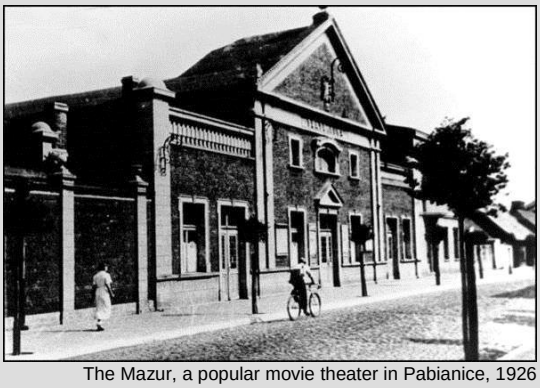
Selection from *The Holocaust: A North Carolina Teacher's Resource*, North Carolina Council on the Holocaust (N.C. Dept. of Public Instruction), 2019, www.ncpublicschools.org/holocaust-council/guide/.

ANTI-SEMITISM ■ MORRIS REMEMBERS THE THREAT

Born in 1928 in Pabianice, Poland, Morris Glass was the youngest of four children in a close-knit Jewish family. While he fondly remembers his growing-up years, they were clouded by the rampant anti-Semitism that had prevailed in Europe for centuries. Everyday activities like playing soccer and going to movies carried the threat of anti-Semitic bullying and attacks.

The happy times, and there were many, occurred within the context of my family and the Jewish community. My experiences in the larger Gentile [non-Jewish] world were quite different—it is difficult to describe the heartaches that I experienced as a child. Anti-Semitism was in the air, and I encountered it in many forms. Verbal taunts like "Dirty Jew," Christ Killer," and "Go back to Palestine" were the most common expressions of anti-Semitism. But violence was also routine, and little children were not exempt from it.

Morris's hometown, Pabianice, Poland, in 1926



The Mazur, a popular movie theater in Pabianice, 1926

One of my favorite pastimes, going to the movies, was often spoiled by anti-Semitic acts—names, threats, and beatings were common. Nevertheless, my friends and I looked forward to going to the movies every week even though our excitement was tempered by fear. Often as we approached the theater we would see groups of older Gentile boys waiting to bait us. We would try to hide our identity by taking off our hats with our school number emblazoned on them, and we would call each other by Gentile names like Valdi or Steffan. Despite our efforts, the Polish boys would still recognize us, and they would force us to pay them a bribe to enter the theater.

But the worst treatment would come after the film was over. Because of this we learned to sense when a movie was ending, and then to move quietly toward the exit in hope of escaping before the Gentile boys left. Once outside, we would run away as fast as we could. Sometimes this strategy worked but often it didn't. I could run fast, but others, like my friend Abraham, who was quite heavy and very slow, were not so fortunate.

One time after a movie, when I was about nine or ten, some Gentile boys caught Abraham and beat him badly. He had blood all over him. We hurriedly wiped away the blood and ran from the side street where the theater was located to the main street. Here we saw a policeman. Since the Polish boys were still following us, we went to the policeman and told him what had happened.

"Why did you beat him up?"

"Well, he is a Jew boy."

"Oh, well, that's okay."

"Who did this to you?" he asked, and we pointed to the group of boys. The officer then asked them, "Why did you beat him up?" They said, "Well, he is a Jew boy." "Oh, well, that's okay," shrugged the officer. This was a response we heard or intuited many times; it was just the way it was growing up a Jew in Poland.

In her kind way my mother would try to comfort me. She would tell me that only a few individuals were so cruel. I wasn't so sure that she was right.

Much like going to the movies, playing soccer also had its dangers. Whenever we played soccer, we would have one eye on the ball and with the other watch for Polish boys. When even two or three approached us, we would grab everything and run for our lives. We wanted to stand up to them, but we realized that it was hopeless; we knew that no one would protect us or come to our rescue. Usually, I ran fast enough to get away, but occasionally I was caught and beaten. When this happened, my mom would calmly take cold towels and lay them on the hurt places to lessen the pain. In her kind way she would try to comfort me. She would tell me that only a few individuals were so cruel. I wasn't so sure that she was right. I do know that even at a very young age, I felt fear. It was a feeling that was reinforced many, many times.

Running when provoked was a response which my friends and I learned from experience; it was also drummed into us by every adult. My dad explained that not responding was a way of protecting myself against greater violence. He said that if I fought back, I might be killed. We wanted to fight. We weren't cowards. But we were told not to, and furthermore, we knew that no one would come to our rescue. So we ran away—at the first sign of trouble, we ran as fast as we could. That's the way I remember it, and it is something that has stayed with me the rest of my life.

There were many more anti-Semitic episodes in my early life, but two in particular illuminate the pain and humiliation that I experienced. When I was nine, I wanted a real soccer ball, one made of leather. A ball like that cost a lot of money, so I saved and saved until finally I could buy the ball of my dreams. I was so happy and so proud of my beautiful new soccer ball. Unfortunately my happiness was short lived. One afternoon, not long after I had bought the ball, Abraham and I were tossing it back and forth as we walked home from school. Suddenly, one of us dropped it, and my precious ball rolled into the street. Before I could retrieve it, a wagon with two horses drove by, and I saw the driver deliberately take his whip and move the ball so that the wagon would run over it. My beautiful ball was crushed beneath the wagon's wheels! The driver laughed and laughed; he thought it was very funny. He knew that I was Jewish. I was broken-hearted; I cried and cried and cried. It was a small act, but it broke my young heart.

While the destruction of my soccer ball hurt me, another incident which I cannot forget is one that humiliated all of the Jewish children of Pabianice. This incident was connected with a celebration of the 1936 Olympics, and it illustrates how widespread and deeply embedded anti-Semitism was. After the Olympics were over, some of the outstanding Polish athletes toured the country. Several were scheduled to come to Pabianice, and a huge festival was organized to honor them. All of the elementary students were asked to march and perform gymnastics during the celebration. We were all required to wear the same outfit—black shorts, white shirts, and white hats.

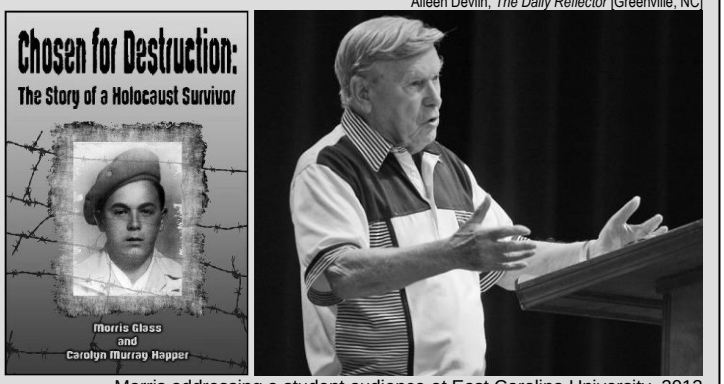
USHMM/Sports & Tourism Museum, Warsaw, Poland

Several Jewish Polish athletes competed for Poland in the 1936 Summer Oympics in Berlin, Germany, including swimmer Lezjor Ilja Szrajbman and fencer Roman Kantor. Both died in the Majdanek concentration camp in 1943.

I was so excited to be part of such a big event, and, since our school was Jewish, we were very anxious to do ourselves proud. We practiced and practiced so as not to make even the smallest mistake; we wanted to be perfect. We took our performance very seriously because we knew

that the Jewish community as a whole would be judged by what we did. During the rehearsals with the other schools, the Gentile students jeered, called us names, and spit on us when we marched onto the field. Practices were excruciating, but I was certain that on the day of the ceremony it would be different. Yet even on that day, a day when we were so proud to be Polish and when we were all dressed alike, the taunts and spitting persisted. Thankfully we performed perfectly, but our pride was mingled with humiliation. Despite being treated in this manner, we loved our country and were proud to be citizens of Poland.

The anti-Semitic episodes from my childhood, painful though they were, were just the prelude to the horror that was to follow. The Nazi conquest of western Poland in 1939 and of eastern Poland in the summer of 1941 was accompanied by terror and murder on a scale unprecedented in history. Nothing in the experience of the European Jews prepared us for the destruction that was to come. We could not have forecast or even imagined the destruction that would be visited upon us.



Morris addressing a student audience at East Carolina University, 2013

Morris was 11 when Germany invaded Poland in 1939, beginning World War II. He and his family endured four and a half years in the Pabianice and Lodz ghettos. In August 1944 the residents of the Lodz ghetto were sent to Auschwitz, where Morris, his father, and his brother were separated from his mother and two sisters, whom he never saw again.

Of 42 members of his family, only Morris, his brother, and a cousin survived. While in a Displaced Persons camp in Italy, Morris learned that his brother had survived and was in a DP camp in Germany. Through an uncle's sponsorship, they came to the U.S., arriving in New York City in June 1949. Morris settled in New Jersey where he bought and expanded a coat manufacturing company. There he met his wife Carol; they have seven children, 18 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. In 2000 they moved to Raleigh, NC, where three sons lived. For years Morris spoke across the state to school, military, and public groups about his Holocaust experience. In 2011 he published his Holocaust memoir, Chosen for Destruction: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor*, co-written with historian Dr. Carolyn Murray Happer.*

[Read the continuation of Morris's narrative in Ch. 4 (The Holocaust: Ghetto) and Ch. 7 (Liberation).]

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Video: Morris Glass's presentation with Carolyn Happer (co-author of Mr. Glass's memoir, *Chosen for Destruction: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor*, 2011), Raleigh Weekend C-Span, 16 May 2013, 28:56
  www.c-span.org/video/?313006-1/chosen-destruction
- Video: Morris Glass's presentation to the Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, April 2013, video possibly taken by the U.S. Dept. of Defense, uploaded on YouTube by *Jacksonville Daily News*, NC
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSkq-kYl__o
- Jewish Life in Poland before the Holocaust (Facing History and Ourselves)
  www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/resistance-during-holocaust/jewish-life-poland-holocaust