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## The Dentist of Auschwitz: Holocaust Survivor to Speak at IWU

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*The Dentist of Auschwitz:*  
**Holocaust Survivor to Speak at IWU**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--It's hard to imagine that working on human teeth could ever be a life-saving skill.

But for Holocaust survivor and author Benjamin Jacobs, being a dentist allowed him to escape one of history's most terrifying events--Germany's systematic extermination of 6 million European Jews during World War II.

Jacobs will recount his harrowing experience in a public address at Illinois Wesleyan University on March 5, speaking at 7:30 p.m. in the Memorial Student Center Main Lounge, 104 E. University, Bloomington. The presentation is free-of-charge.

Born in Dobra, Poland in 1919, Jacobs was a second-year dental student when World War II broke out in 1939. His book, *The Dentist of Auschwitz: A Memoir*, describes his life as an inmate in a series of German concentration camps, where he worked as a dentist for four years.

"My memoir details the day to day aspects of life in the camps," Jacobs says. "While I write about Nazi atrocities, of which there were many, they are described not from a historian's perspective, but from my personal experience, with the full memory of near starvation, awash in our own wastes, taunted and caged like animals--perhaps the grossest human degradation imaginable."

Jacobs' ordeal began in the early 1930's, when the National Socialist German Workers (Nazi) Party began to persecute Jews under the rule of dictator Adolf Hitler. Hitler eventually passed German laws which stripped Jews of their citizenship, forced them to quit their jobs, and segregated them from certain sections of German cities.

As the persecution progressed into the late '30s, Jews and other "inferior" people such as gypsies and homosexuals were driven into ghettos and concentration camps, including Jacobs.

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"We were forced to leave our home with nothing more than what we could carry and were driven into a ghetto," Jacobs recalls. "We relied on a starvation ration from the Third Reich, whose mind was not on us surviving in the first place."

Jacobs and his brother and father were eventually moved to a forced labor camp, where inmates were literally worked to death.

"You felt that since they wanted us in a labor camp, we would work and get fed," he explained. "Instead, the camps only accelerated the dying... and so of the 168 Jews deported with me [from Dobra]--within the first year, our numbers were decimated in half."

When German military advances failed on the Russian front in 1945, many concentration camps in occupied Poland were expanded into concealed extermination centers. One of these camps, called Auschwitz, became the largest killing center in Europe, with over 1.25 million murders. Auschwitz welcomed Jacobs and other prisoners under the sign, "Work shall make you free."

"Auschwitz was something special," Jacobs recalls. "You couldn't just enter. You had to march before a group of doctors who had to decide whether you were good enough to enter."

Three out of every four Auschwitz prisoners were labeled not "good enough" for physical labor. These prisoners were then separated from the others and marched to gas chambers to die or used by camp doctors for grotesque medical experiments.

Those who did pass the selection worked long, grueling hours in severe weather and endured savage beatings and random murders. Jacobs' father was beaten to death in Auschwitz.

By the time Jacobs arrived at Auschwitz, his rudimentary dentistry skills had developed enough to allow him to serve as the camp dentist. Jacobs survived by working on the teeth of Nazi soldiers, who in turn forced him to crack open the jaws of dead inmates to remove gold fillings.

Jacobs' survival in Auschwitz was also fostered by a Christian Polish girl with whom he maintained a clandestine romantic relationship for two years. The girl, who could have been put to death had she been caught, brought Jacobs food, medicine, and offered to hide him and his father should

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they try to escape.

Following an eighteen-month stay in Auschwitz, Jacobs was transferred to work in a Nazi weapons factory in Germany. There, Jacobs endured hard labor until 1945, when German enemies began to advance into the country and a Nazi downfall became evident.

Evacuating the camps in the face of impending defeat, German troops forced Jacobs and other prisoners into what were known as "death marches," forcing inmates to walk hundreds of miles cross-country. Those who fell behind were shot and left to die in the roads.

Prisoners were marched to the Bay of Lübeck near the Baltic Sea, where Jacobs and 15,000 other prisoners were packed into three German ocean liners serving as floating concentration camps. Four days before the Nazis surrendered, British Royal Air Force planes bombed and sank the ships, killing over 13,000 people.

Jacobs, one of only 1600 survivors, was rescued from the water at the last minute, by an overcrowded boat in which someone recognized him as "the dentist."

In 1949, after the war ended, Jacobs emigrated to the United States. Since then, he has lectured on the Holocaust and his story of survival at over 250 schools across the country.

"There are only a few of us left," Jacobs says. "In the next decades, we too will be history, and the extent of this tragedy will then only be in books and museums.

"The Holocaust is a story of intolerance gone awry. It is a story of a time when people didn't care. Please don't let this happen again."

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts--a facility housing 60 faculty offices, six classrooms, and other facilities for social science, humanities, business and economics, and interdisciplinary studies' faculty--opened in August, 1997, as well as a new \$6.8 million residence hall. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I"

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institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 159 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.