

# JOSEPH GRINGLAS

## BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Joseph Gringlas (née Grynglas), son of Leizor and Blima, was born on May 20, 1926, in Ostrowiec, Poland. The youngest of six children, Joseph had four brothers—

Mendel, Shlomo, Jankel and Sol—and one sister, Miriam Baila. The family was observant- lit candles every Sabbath and celebrated all Jewish holidays- and Joseph attended *cheder* every day after public school.

On September 1, 1939, the German army invaded Poland, and World War II began. The German army occupied Ostrowiec one week later. The day the army arrived, Joseph saw Jewish doctors and lawyers killed in the town square. Food began to be rationed, and Leizor was no longer allowed to work. In 1941, a ghetto was established in Ostrowiec, but the family did not have to move as their pre-war home was in the area designated as the ghetto. Joseph worked in the ghetto: he cleaned streets, worked in a kitchen, did manual labor, and was sent to work in the Ostrowiec steelworks. His brother Sol also worked in the factory. In October 1942, most of the family was sent to Treblinka during the liquidation of the town ghetto.

Joseph was later separated from Sol and sent to Blizyn, a concentration camp that was being built. Joseph helped to build the barracks and also worked in a quarry breaking rocks to make roads. While at Blizyn, Joseph tried to supplement the paltry daily food ration and was beaten for stealing potatoes. Joseph was deported from Blizyn to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he lied about his age during Selection and was sent to work at Auschwitz III-Monowitz. While at Auschwitz III-Monowitz, he was reunited with his brother, Sol. In January of 1945,

Joseph and Sol endured the Death March from the Auschwitz camps and were transported from Gleiwitz to Mittlebau- Dora, where the United States Army liberated them on April 11, 1945. Joseph and Sol were the only members of their family to survive the Holocaust.

After liberation, Joseph and Sol lived at the Landsberg Displaced Persons Camp. Joseph went to technical school in Esslingen and, in 1950, immigrated to the United States. He married Reli Keisler Weisberger, another survivor, in Detroit in 1957. They have two children, Marcy and Larry, five grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Joseph's interview for USC Shoah Foundation was conducted on April 5, 1996, in Southfield, Michigan.

# SOL GRINGLAS

## BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



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Sol Gringlas (née Grynglas), son of Leizor and Blima, was born on August 22, 1923, in Ostrowiec, Poland. Sol lived

in an apartment with his parents, four brothers, and a sister. His parents worked together in a local shop selling shoes. He grew up in an observant household that had Friday night dinners, lit Sabbath candles, attended synagogue, and prayed together.

His elder brother worked in a tailor shop and decided to teach Sol how to sew, unknowingly imparting a skill in Sol that would later save his life. They worked side by side with each other for a year before the 1939 invasion of Poland. When the Nazis marched into Ostrowiec, they immediately forced the Jewish people to work in factories. The Nazis forced the Jews to build barracks, where hundreds of people were made to work and live under the watchful eyes of Ukrainian guards.

For one year, Sol worked in the factory without any family contact before the barracks were liquidated and he was deported to the concentration camp, Auschwitz in 1943. From there, he was sent to a subcamp, Auschwitz III-Monowitz. His brother, Joseph was also sent to Auschwitz III-Monowitz, and it was there that the brothers were reunited.

The two brothers together survived the death march to Gleiwitz when the Nazis evacuated Auschwitz, as the Soviet army approached the camp. They were then transported, by train for one week without food, to the Dora Nordhausen slave labor camp built into the mountains in Germany. Sol worked grueling 8-hour shifts in the mountain range digging stones to build an underground factory.

In the coming days, the camp would face bombings from the Americans. When the bombings began, he

and his brother would often take cover in the kitchen. One night during the bombings, exhausted and hopeless, Sol turned to Joseph and said “you know what? Let’s lay on the floor and let the walls fall on us so we won’t have to suffer anymore.” Joseph refused and instead they fled the camp and found a basement to sleep in for the night. When morning came the next day, the brothers learned of the SS Guards murdering any remaining survivors in the barracks who had not died in the bombings. From then on, the bombings became more frequent and the Gringlas brothers often hid among the pipes in the kitchen. The night before they were liberated, Sol was hit in the leg and had pieces of shrapnel preventing him from walking. It was not until the next day, on April 11, 1945, that they were found and saved by American soldiers.

The brothers returned to their hometown in Poland in search of their family. They found no one and felt it was not safe to remain in Poland and decided to leave for the Landsberg Displaced Persons Camp in Germany. It was at this camp that Sol met his soon-to-be wife, Paula. The young couple moved to a kibbutz in Landsberg, Germany and were married months later. Shortly thereafter, Paula gave birth to their first daughter, Anne.

Sol and his family called Germany home for two years before immigrating to the United States in 1949. They ultimately settled in Detroit, MI, where Joseph also joined them in 1950, and Sol and Paula’s family grew to welcome two more children: Helene and Leonard. At the time of his passing from Covid-19 in 2020, Sol had six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Sol’s interview for USC Shoah Foundation was conducted at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus on September 9, 2014, in Farmington Hills, Michigan.