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Holocaust Survivors' Insurance Ordeal

While living on relief agency handouts, Jack Weiss, his sister and three brothers—all survivors of Holocaust era concentration camps—remembered that their father, who was killed at Auschwitz, had purchased a life insurance policy from a large Italian insurance company, Assicurazioni Generali.

In late 1945, Weiss and his siblings contacted the insurance company to file a claim, when they were unable to produce documentation of the policy and or death of their father—their claim was denied.

Nearly 60 years later, Weiss and seven other Holocaust survivors have enlisted the services of attorney William M. Shernoff to represent them in their lawsuits filed against Generali for full payment on their policies. Shernoff estimates the value of the policies to be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars each.

Over the years, Generali has maintained that it is not liable for these policies, mostly because their assets were seized by Nazis who demanded payment. Generali also claims their operations in Czechoslovakia were nationalized in May of 1945, before Weiss says his family was refused for lack of documentation.

Czechoslovakian economist Tomas Jelinek said the nationalization of insurance companies in his country didn't happen until procedures were published in October of 1946.