

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Archives

Oral History Interviews of the
Kean College of New Jersey
Holocaust Resource Center

Interview with Manya Mandelbaum
March 19, 1990
RG-50.002*0019

PREFACE

On March 19, 1990, Manya Mandelbaum was interviewed on videotape by Bernard Weinstein on behalf of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The interview took place in Union, New Jersey and is part of the Research Institute Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center created a summary and time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that these finding aids attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet have not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The finding aids should not be used in place of the interview itself.

Rights to the interview are held by the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum houses a copy of the interview as a result of a contributing organization agreement with the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. Details concerning the Museum's rights to use and reproduce the interview are contained in the contributing organization agreement.

Summary of the
Interview with Manya Mandelbaum
March 19, 1990

Manya Mandelbaum was born in Debica, near Kraków, Poland on August 16, 1919. Her family consisted of her parents, four girls and two boys. She is the only one from her family to survive the Holocaust. After a radio announcement urging people to flee in 1939, Manya and some of her family members tried to escape east to Russia, but were driven back by German bombing. After marrying in 1940, Manya and her husband Simon lived in the Kraków ghetto, sharing their apartment with 15 other families. When the ghetto was liquidated in 1943, Manya was sent to Plaszów concentration camp. Her husband had been sent to Plaszów earlier to build the barracks. In August 1944, most of the Plaszów prisoners were deported to other camps. Manya was sent to Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. In January 1945, she and 300 other women were moved to Hamburg, Germany to work in a plastic factory.

During heavy Allied bombings, she and four other inmates managed to escape from the factory and were eventually liberated by American soldiers. She was reunited with her husband in a hospital in Wels, Austria. They emigrated to the United States in November 1949. They lived in Brooklyn, New York before settling in Hillside, New Jersey where Manya's husband is in the construction business.

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**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Manya Mandelbaum
March 19, 1990**

01:01:00

Manya's family consisted of her parents, four girls and two boys.

She is the only survivor from her family. She lived in Kraków. She had a happy, strictly Orthodox life. Even in the camp, she ate kosher food only. Her mother was one of nine children. No one survived. She was the fifth of six children. Her father sold bakers' needs, everything but flour, really hardware.

01:06:00

She had a good relationship with the Poles in Kraków. The difficulty was outside of Kraków with the peasants. Antisemitism grew in 1937, 1938 and 1939. Her husband studied engineering in Haifa, Israel. He was closed out by "numerus clausus."

01:11:00

When the war started in 1939, there were radio announcements to flee. Older people did not but younger people did. Many walked

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from west to east, to Russia, etc. She walked with her boy friend, Simon, her brother and two other family members.

01:16:00

Heavy German bombing on the road made life difficult, so they returned to Kraków. Simon's family drove east by car. They survived in Siberia. She remembers the beginning of German laws and proclamations. The ghetto was organized and older people were deported. There was work but insufficient food. It was miserable.

01:21:00

She married Simon in 1940. Fifteen families lived in their apartment. Her parents were deported. She wanted to join them. Her parents insisted that she remain with her husband. The ghetto was liquidated after two years in 1943. People were moved from the ghetto to the building which previously housed the Optima Chocolate Factory and then to camps.

01:26:00

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She tells of the deportation of her family members. There was a Judenrat. They helped at times. Her survival is unbelievable to her.

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01:31:00

The people in the ghetto who worked were sent to Plaszów concentration camp in Poland. She and her sister-in-law were sent there. Those without work were shipped by transport to be murdered. All the children were gassed in Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. One boy was left on the balcony, called for his mother, and was left behind. He was the only youngster in the group to survive.

01:36:00

Her husband went to Plaszów first. He built the barracks. She worked for the Madritsch firm, making blouses for the Wehrmacht. Men and women were separated, but some men were able to visit their wives. Her husband did.

01:41:00

Life in Plaszów was awful. They were only given bread and soup. The Germans took all of their valuables. Some threw their valuables in the latrine. In August of 1944, men were taken to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Many were sent to Auschwitz. Her brother was shot in January of 1945. He was the

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youngest in the family. He was operated on for his appendix and two days later they had to walk from the camp because the Russians were coming. He was then shot.

01:46:00

In Auschwitz, she remembers the immediate shaving of heads. When she got off the transport, she asked a Polish woman for water. The woman said, "Give me your jacket, you won't need it, I'll give you water." Never!

01:51:00

This was the end of 1944. Her sister-in-law, a pessimist, said that they were heading for the gas chamber. She, an optimist, said "No, it's a shower." After the shower, there was a heap of clothing. Although, it didn't fit, they took the clothing quickly. They avoided the tattooing of numbers. Others, with numbers, were gathered together, and moved away.

01:56:00

She left Auschwitz in January, 1945 with 300 other women. They were brought to Hamburg, Germany. They were assigned to work in a factory. They worked with plastic and were able to secretly melt

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it to make candles for Friday night candles. Their day started at 6 in the morning. They marched to the factory in groups of 100. She was hit by a German guard with a rubber truncheon for being in a group of five accused of talking.

02:01:00

There was heavy Allied air bombing at this time. She didn't eat soup, only bread, marmelade and margarine. For Passover, she only ate potatoes and water. One night, she and four other women walked away from the camp. They walked and walked but no German would accept them for lodging.

02:06:00

Finally, they met some Poles who gave them some of their rags to replace their prison clothes. One day, during a particularly heavy air raid, they went down into the shelter. Then they heard that the British and Americans were there. They found a G.I. named Bernstein who gave them food and lodging.

02:11:00

This was at the end of April 1945. She started to go to stores for food and clothing. The war ended on May 8, 1945. Their home

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at this time was in Bitterfeld, Germany where they found 16 other women who had also escaped.

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02:16:00

The other girls were sophisticated and made them feel naive. Manya's group was thinking of returning to Poland. The other group was endeavoring to find husbands. Manya's group went to a gathering of displaced persons in Prague, Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic). She learned that her husband was in a hospital in Wels, Austria. She told her sister-in-law, aunt, and the others that she was going to leave them to find Simon.

02:21:00

She learned in the hospital that Simon was planning to return to Poland. In fact, he was going to leave his home in Bindermichl, near Linz, Austria later that day for Poland. She found him miraculously in his bed, a weak skeleton. This was the beginning of their lives. She nursed him for several months.

02:26:00

In January 1946, they received a beautiful apartment from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. They registered to enter the United States. They waited for three and a half years. They received papers and arrived in November 1949.

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They came to the New York to join Abraham Zuckerman, Simon's partner. In February 1950, they moved to Brooklyn, New York and lived there for 16 years. Then they moved to Elizabeth, New Jersey for three years, then to their home in Hillside, New Jersey.

02:31:00

She has talked to her three sons about her experiences, as well as to her grandchildren. The sons are university trained professionals. She does not care to return to Poland, but loves the United States and Israel. The United States means freedom and good education.