

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **Archives**

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

**Interview with Susan Schmelzer  
December 1, 1987  
RG-50.002\*0025**

## **PREFACE**

On December 1, 1987, Susan Schmelzer was interviewed on videotape by Jeanne Miller and 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 Susan Schmelzer**  
**December 1, 1987**

Susan Schmelzer was born on February 23, 1923, in Zaleshchiki, Poland. Susan was the oldest of three children. Susan's father owned a flour mill and property. Zaleshchiki was occupied by Russians from 1939 until 1942.

The Germans came in 1942 and began murdering Jews. 2,000 Jews were murdered in one day in November 1942. Susan's family was saved on this occasion by hiding in a basement. Some of the Jews were sent to Belzec concentration camp in Poland. Susan's family was sent to a ghetto in Tolstoye, Ukraine. While they lived in the ghetto, Susan performed slave labor in the surrounding fields. She met her future husband, Paul, in the Tolstoye ghetto. 3,000 Jews in the Tolstoye ghetto were murdered, including her parents and her nine-year-old sister. Susan recalls several hiding places and escapes of her, her future husband, and a girlfriend.

After liberation, they went to Chernovtky, Ukraine where they were married both in court and by a Rabbi. They went to Germany in 1946. The Schmelzers moved to the United States in 1949.

**Time-coded notes of the  
Interview with Susan Schmelzer  
December 1, 1987**

01:00:00

Susan Schmelzer was born in 1923, in a comfortable home in Zalecchyki, Poland on the Rumanian border (Zaleschiki, Ukraine). Her father was in business. She was one of three children. Zaleschiki was occupied by the Russians from 1939 until 1942. The Germans came in 1942 and started killing Jews. They killed about 2,000 Jews in one day in November 1942. Susan and her family were saved by hiding in their basement. Susan's father had a flour mill and property. Susan went to public school. The people in Zaleschiki were very anti-Semitic.

01:05:00

One of Susan's teachers was a spy for Germany. Susan's family "believed, but not too religious." Susan played the violin. There were about 2,000 Jews in her town, which was a resort town.

01:10:00

Susan's parents sent her to another town where she continued her scholastic studies, which included Hebrew, and her violin studies. Susan didn't feel any persecution under the Russians. Susan is the oldest of the three children in her family. Her sister was killed at age 9, and her brother survived and lives in the United States.

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01:15:00

The bridge in Zaleshchiki to the Rumanian border was bombed by the Germans. The Germans on motorcycles, accompanied by dogs, searched for Jews. Susan had to leave school. Her family moved to another town, where they were not known, and, like they had done before, enrolled in school there.

01:20:00

Many were killed during a November 1942 Aktion, but one of Susan's girlfriends survived. A number of people at that time were sent to Belzec concentration camp in Poland. In September, the Germans began to send Jews, including Susan's family, to the ghetto in Tluste (Tolstoye, Ukraine). In March 1943, they were assigned to work in the fields. This was really slave labor. Susan met her future husband, Paul, there.

01:25:00

Susan's brother also worked in the fields. The boys were separated from the girls. Susan's brother became ill with typhus. Susan's parents remained in their house in the ghetto while she and her brother worked in the fields. While she was working, in May 1943, she heard shots. 3,000 Jews from the ghetto were killed, including her parents. Susan's father had to dig his own grave. All this action was carried out accompanied by violin music. Susan's sister said, "I am so young. Let me live." However, they killed her. Susan's mother was 40, her father 45, and her sister was 9 years old.

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01:30:00

The victims were buried in a mass grave. She couldn't visit it then, but she did visit it from the United States recent to the time of the interview. There is no marker. The sight is a vegetable farm. Nothing grows at the grave. Susan remembers seeing limbs, arms and legs. They were not animal limbs, but human limbs. Susan's future husband took care of her. They wanted to join the underground but they never had a chance to. They did have a gun for this purpose though.

01:35:00

Susan's future husband's brother was killed at this time. The Germans heard that there were guns in their group Susan's future husband threw their gun away among the beets, then ran away and hid in a cemetery. The Germans saw one of that one of the boys had bullets as well. They cut off all of his fingers, dismembered, and then killed him. Susan and a friend joined her future husband and were determined to escape. The three of them lived in attics, chicken coops, and fields. Susan remembers thinking that birds had nests and ants had their places to crawl in, but they had no place to be.

01:40:00

They removed their arm-bands with Jewish stars. The Polish farmers knew they were Jews. They slept outdoors until December. Then, a Polish woman provided them with a place to sleep in a house in the woods. Then, in March, they were liberated by the Russians. One of the Germans had an injured leg. Susan's husband bandaged his leg for him.

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01:45:00

After liberation, they went to Chernowitz (Chernovtsky, Ukraine) and remained there about one year. They wanted to go to Israel and join the Haganah. However, they ended up in Germany. They were married in Chernovtsky by a Rabbi and in court. Susan remained in Chernovtsky and her husband was sent to Russia for "a couple of months." He returned and they went to Germany. Susan became pregnant in 1946. Susan's brother was in the United States. He sent papers. And, they went to the United States.

01:50:00

Their son was born in a displaced persons camp in 1946. They arrived in the United States in 1949. They first settled in the Bronx in New York. They then moved to Queens in New York, and eventually to Elizabeth, New Jersey. They have talked with their children about their Holocaust experiences.