

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Archives

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

Interview with Jack Spiegel  
September 23, 1993  
RG-50.002\*0027

## **PREFACE**

On September 23, 1993, Jack Spiegel was interviewed on videotape by Joseph J. Preil 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 Jack Spiegel  
September 23, 1993**

Jack Spiegel was born in Łódź, Poland on March 17, 1918. Of more than 50 immediate and extended family members living in Poland in 1939, Jack is the only survivor. He and his family were in the Warsaw ghetto in Poland until October 1942. From there, Jack was shipped to Majdanek, a concentration camp in Poland, and Belzec, a concentration camp in Poland. He went to Opatow in Poland but was able to return to the Warsaw ghetto to rejoin his family. In October 1942, his father died. Jack was taken to a camp in Minsk, Belarus, for three weeks, then to a camp in Bobruysk, Belarus, where he remained from October 1942 until March 1944. Of the 3000 prisoners in Bobruysk concentration camp, only 91 survived. He was then taken to several camps for short stays, until he finally ended up at Budzyn, Poland, where he stayed from April 1944 to December 1944. He traveled to several other camps, and remained in Flossenburg, Germany, until March 1945, when he was moved to Dachau, where he was liberated by the United States on April 29, 1945. He describes the incredible cruelty he observed and personally experienced in many camps. Jack believes he aided in his own survival by always volunteering for new jobs in different camps. After the war, he convalesced and remained in Lyon, France for 18 months. He moved to Israel in 1948 and stayed there until he emigrated to the United States in 1960. Two of his children

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were born in Israel. He has three children and three grandchildren.

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Time-coded notes of the  
Interview with Jack Spiegel  
September 23, 1993

01:00:00

Shows a family picture taken during the 1920's. In the photo are his parents, Jack, and his siblings. A middle class, well-to-do family. Father in export-import business.

01:05:00

An uncle sang in a choir and came to the United States to sing. Jack was born in Łódź, Poland in March of 1918. Immediate family of eight: two parents and six children. Cried when he tells of removing golden bridge from father's mouth after father's death in order to buy food. The bridge never helped.

01:10:00

Tells of family dilemma. Where to live during period of Russian-German pact in the beginning of World War II?

01:15:00

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**2**

He and a relative went to the Russian side, then he went to Warsaw, Poland. His family went to Warsaw. Jack returned to Łódź in brother's army uniform in order to extricate his sister from the ghetto. Coincidentally his grandfather died in the Warsaw ghetto at this time.

01:20:00

Jack and his sister then went to Brzeziny, Poland, then to Koluszki, Poland, and then Warsaw. Their mother was very concerned for their safety. Only Jack survived of eight immediate family members. Extended family in Poland in 1939? No less than 50. Jack was the only survivor. Does not know if the other members of his family survived.

01:25:00

He was with his family in the ghetto until October 1942. His father was taken to the hospital with typhus. Jack and a friend smuggled food into the ghetto.

01:30:00

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This lasted about one year. Jack supported his family this way. Finally had to stop smuggling because the Poles knew and reported him to the Germans for five pounds of sugar.

01:35:00

Talks about miserable conditions in ghetto. Volunteered to take his father's place to be shipped to Lublin, Poland then to Belzec, a concentration camp in Poland. Jack went to Opatow, Poland, after four months and then was able to return to Warsaw in 1942. He remained in Warsaw until October 1942 when his father died, then he went to Minsk, Belarus, and, finally to Bobruysk, Belarus.

01:40:00

In Minsk, he was in a camp - his third camp in about three weeks. Had been in camps in Lublin and Belzec. After Minsk, he was moved to Bobruysk in a shipment of 1500 people. A horrible welcome. The officer said: "If you work, all will be fine." If not, he took a pistol and killed a person.

01:45:00

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He was in bungalow number five. After two months, only 100 of 300 in his bunk remained. The others were murdered regularly, especially on Sundays.

01:50:00

His "cousin" brought Jack a loaf of bread on day. Jack refused to take it. The chef heard of this refusal and told Jack he was stupid. One day, Jack hit a Jewish Kapo. The Kapo brought out two Germans who confronted Jack and were about to kill Jack cruelly. Suddenly, the chef came out and saved Jack.

01:55:00

After Jack recovered, the chef offered Jack a kitchen job. Jack took "a young kid" to assist him. He found that the food for the dogs was better than the food for prisoners. In that camp only 91 people were left from 3000. Arrived in Bobruysk in October 1942, remained there until March 1944.

02:00:00

Went back to Minsk, then Majdanek for one week. Then to Budzyn, Poland, April 1944 until November or December. Then two weeks in Mielec, Poland, another two weeks in Wieliczka, Poland. The



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guards now were older people, the "younger kids" had now been shipped to the front. Has a story in Bobruysk and also another story from his experiences at Flossenburg-Herzberg in Germany.

02:05:00

He volunteered for whatever was needed. He claimed to be a mechanic, an engineer, etc. Thus he generally remained a short while, and then he would be shipped to another camp. He did not want to remain too long in any camp.

02:10:00

In Bobruysk, Byelorussia, they would hang young kids to let the prisoners know what could happen to all of them. An SS man shot at Jack, and barely missed him, for stretching his hands while working in the field.

02:15:00

Another cruel story, a senseless murder at Bobruysk. He knew that a camp in Germany would be better than a camp in Poland. In Poland they were all Jews; in Germany and the West, a variety of national backgrounds. In Flossenburg two weeks. In Herzberg, summer of 1944 until March 1945. Then to Dachau.

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02:20:00

Walked to Dachau, otherwise all transfers were in cattle cars. In Flossenburg, they asked for mechanics and electricians. He volunteered, but did not specify which he was. He identified himself as a Pole, not as a Jew.

02:25:00

He worked in a tunnel where they were working on V-2 rockets. A problem developed in the pipes. He decided to play the role of an expert engineer and succeeded. It worked. Now, he's a genius. His Polish Kapo did not care for this development and recognition of Jack.

02:30:00

The German boss did not go along with the Kapo. The Kapo then assigned Jack to clean feces. An emergency developed. The machinery broke down again. Jack was summoned again and came with his miserable odor. The order was given for him to clean himself.

02:35:00

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Describes the chaos of war ending. He and his group arrived at Dachau. Now, the Americans bombed Dachau. Liberated by Americans on April 29, 1945. His health through these years was good, but he was weak. He was sent to France to convalesce.

02:40:00

At the end of the war, he weighed 85 pounds, should have been 120. Convalesced in Lyon, France for about six months. He was alone in France, no friends. Then a family took him in to live "like a son" for about a year.

02:45:00

Relates how he was put in touch with his uncle in California. Could not be admitted to the United States. In 1948, he went to Israel. Remained there until 1960, served in the army, married and had two children in Israel. They had a third child in the United States. Has three grandchildren in the United States, now resides in Staten Island, New York. Always talked with his children about the Holocaust.

02:45:00

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His religious observance "has become cooler. I respect religion. I lost confidence. I keep tradition 100 percent." He sees human nature "in a positive way." Speaks about miraculous development of the State of Israel.