

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Archives

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

Interview with Max Findling
December 3 and December 22, 1992
RG-50.002*0033

PREFACE

On December 3 and December 22, 1992, Max Findling was interviewed on videotape by Sidney Langer 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 Max Findling
December 3 and December 22, 1992

Max Findling was born in Zmigrod, Poland on July 28, 1923. The Findling family had lived in Zmigrod for 200 years until the Holocaust. Zmigrod is near the Czech border, about 170 kilometers from Kraków, Poland.

Max provides a detailed description of the Holocaust experience in Poland from the first week of the war in 1939 until his liberation. Max describes the mass murder of Jews in Zmigrod in July 1942. He also describes his numerous labor assignments, his imprisonment in Jaslo, Poland, his escape from Plaszów concentration camp in Poland, his incredibly dangerous return trip to Zmigrod, and other camps, including Wola Duchacka, Plaszów, Julag I, Jerozolimska, Czestochowa, and Hasag, all in Poland. In Hasag, he worked in a munitions factory from 1943 until 1945.

Max is the only survivor of his 200-member family. Max went to Israel in 1948 and married in 1949. He has three sons. His oldest son lives in Fair Lawn, New Jersey and accompanied Max to these interviews as well as to his two return trips to Poland, one of which was to testify in a 1972 trial, at the request of the American Jewish Congress, against Germans accused of killing Jews in Drasko Pomorskie, Poland.

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**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Max Findling
December 3 and December 22, 1992**

DECEMBER 3, 1992

01:00:00

Max Findling resides in Brooklyn, New York. He was brought to the Holocaust Resource Center at Kean College in Union, New Jersey by his son Michael of Fair Lawn, New Jersey. Max begins with pictures of his native Zmigrod, Poland. He shows a picture of a 400 year old synagogue in the town. Max returned to the town in 1990. Max shows a picture of a location where 1,250 Jews were murdered on July 7, 1942 by the Germans. He shows a picture of the forest outside the town where his sister, the town's rabbi and approximately 40 or 50 other Jews were killed.

01:05:00

Max shows a picture of the cemetery erected by Poles which refers to "people" killed by Nazis. The cemetery makes no mention of Jews. Max was born in Zmigrod on July 28, 1923. He lived there until the Holocaust. Max's family lived in Zmigrod for 200 years. Zmigrod was near the Czech border, about 170 kilometers from

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Kraków, Poland. The town had a population of 2,000, about 80 percent were Jewish. The surrounding communities were predominantly Gentile.

01:10:00

Max's father had a large family in the town. Zmigrod was a religious, observant community. The children attended public schools in the morning and cheder in the afternoons. Max had an older brother and an older sister. His older brother died of pneumonia in Skarzysko-Kamienna, a camp in Poland, in 1944. Max's sister was murdered in Warzyce forest in 1942. Max's parents were killed in the forest outside Zmigrod on July 7, 1942. Out of the extended paternal family in Poland at the beginning of the war, "a couple of hundred people," Max seems to be the only survivor.

01:15:00

Max's mother's family was from Hungary. Max's mother's siblings moved to the United States before the war. Max was harassed in school for being a Jew by Polish children. He describes the local priest encouraging anti-Semitism particularly on Good Fridays.

01:20:00

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Max feels that most of the Poles in Zmigrod were anti-Semitic. Germans came to Zmigrod about one week after the beginning of the war. By the end of 1939, they burnt the synagogue. They looked for Jews to throw into the fire. Because this activity was rather disorganized, no Jews were burnt.

01:25:00

In 1940, the Poles in Zmigrod identified the Jews to the Germans. A Judenrat (Jewish Council) was formed by the Germans. The Germans came to the Judenrat for funds, and then for people to perform labor, clearing snow from the roads. Max does not criticize the Judenrat. Many Jews were compelled to perform labor in town and nearby. Max was involved in road construction. This was the winter of 1941.

01:30:00

In 1942, the "stumme Dovid" left town innocently and became the first casualty. On July 7, 1942, all the Jews in Zmigrod were assembled in one place. Most of the Jews came. Polish and German police surrounded the area. The older people were taken to the other side.

01:35:00

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About 1,250 Jews were taken by trucks. The Gestapo came and told the younger group to go home. Max describes how he learned the fate of the 1,250 who were murdered in this Aktion. The remaining Jews were assembled a week later and told they were being transported to a working camp. They were taken to a jail in Jaslo, Poland, where they stayed overnight, and then by train to Plaszów, a concentration camp in Poland.

01:40:00

This was July 1942. Max was in Plaszów a couple of weeks. He heard this camp was to become a concentration camp and not a labor camp. He decided to escape, but his brother refused to join him.

Max went on a train heading for Zmigrod. Max became nervous because he did not speak Polish very well. Max left the train at a small town because of this fear. There, he met a woman from Zmigrod who indicated an Aktion might occur in this town soon.

01:45:00

Max arranged with a Polish policeman to accompany him to Zmigrod by train. The train's engineer watched over Max at Jaslo, as the policeman left. This made Max nervous. Max escaped from the station. He went into a house (a restroom), probably a public

one.

01:50:00

After several hours, Max left the toilet in which he hid. A man discovered him. Max told the truth. The Pole, a 17-year old boy, acted decently and offered him some food. The Pole accompanied Max to the train station. At the appointed location, Max jumped from the train.

01:50:00

Max found himself in a forest. There was a lot of rain. A person came to this isolated spot and took Max to his home. The man agreed to take Max by horse and wagon to Zmigrod. The man's wife told her husband that Max was a Jew and that he should not agree to transport him. It was finally agreed that Max would walk and the man would follow behind. After a couple of hours, they arrived in Zmigrod.

01:55:00

Max arrived at home. He found his sister and others. He told them the story of his escape. Two of his cousins then ran away from Plaszów and returned to Zmigrod. Max visited a Gentile girl

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who was his acquaintance. She told him that the Germans would return in two days with serious consequences for the Jews. The Gentile girl gleaned this information from a German policeman who visited her home. The girl offered to keep Max and protect him. Max decided that he must return to his sister.

02:00:00

The Germans did come. Max hid with his sister and their friends. A Jewish policeman and Germans came. The Jewish policeman warned Max that if he was there, he should come out. Max refused. At night, Max went out of the hiding place and saw two cousins who had also hidden during the day.

02:05:00

They all went to the forest. Some Poles, in masks, came and demanded their belongings. Max recognized their voices. This did not help. Max then decided to go to a Pole who had done business with Max's father. Max was given a slice of bread and was warned to disappear. Max returned to the forest. A couple of days later, some Polish police came, captured the group, and took them to a neighboring town to the mayor.

02:10:00

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The group was returned to Zmigrod, in chains, and jailed. The next morning, German police arrived and warned Max that he would be shot with the others the next morning. This continued for a week. Additional Jews were brought in each day. Then, all of them were transferred to the jail in Jaslo, the largest jail in the area. Max claimed that he had nothing left but they found the equivalent of 100 dollars on him.

02:15:00

Max was beaten mercilessly by the Polish and German police. He was then dragged back to prison. There, he met Rabbi Chuna Halberstam. who introduced him to Rabbi Meled. There were 30-50 people in the room. Conditions were extremely primitive. They had to line up daily at 6 a.m. This continued for a couple of weeks.

02:20:00

The Gestapo came and asked their professions. When the rabbi identified himself, "It was murder, but he survived." Finally, they selected about 12 of the younger people and took them to the town of Jaslo. They were assigned to sort clothing and returned every night to the prison.

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02:25:00

Max bribed a Polish policeman with a golden watch from the clothing he was sorting in order to see his sister. Max describes the Yom Kippur service in prison. The guards came and there were terrible beatings. The rabbi's predictions for a real Succot did not come true. Instead, some of the prisoners, including Max's sister, were taken to the forest and murdered.

02:30:00

Then, the daily departure from the prison to the labor site ceased. Instead, the remaining prisoners were taken, by truck one day, seemingly to be murdered. A German officer looked at them and said they were still good for labor. They were taken to Krosno, Poland and placed on a train for Kraków and arrived in Wola Duchacka, Poland. This was the end of 1942. A person who seemed to be a decent sort decided one day while the group was at work, to round up the five or six children and killed them.

02:35:00

Next, they were moved to Plaszów Julag I (Julag I, a concentration camp in Plaszów, Poland). Leo Rosner, Max's friend, found his

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father in Plaszów. Typhus struck them in 1943. A Dr. Margolis came to Max and gave him an injection. Max was one of the few inmates to survive. Max's brother got him to leave the infirmary in a very weakened condition.

02:40:00

Max remembers a lot of illness in the camp. They were transferred to Plaszów Jerozolimska (Jerozolimska, a concentration camp in Poland) under Amon Göth. Max remembers Plaszów Jerozolimska as a real concentration camp. Max's brother became ill and was transferred to Skarzysko-Kamienna, a concentration camp in Poland, where he died of pneumonia in 1944. Max was transferred in 1943 to Czestochowa Hasag-Warta (Hasag, a concentration camp in Czestochowa, Poland).

02:45:00

Max's new work was munitions. He worked in Czestochowa Hasag-Warta from 1943 until liberation in 1945. The food was not bad in Czestochowa. The German S.S. officer in charge in Czestochowa was Georg Bartenschlager.

02:50:00

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Max remembers that Bartenschlager was not too bad. Bartenschlager went around with two dogs. "He had a lot of belief in us because we did good work." They did not hear too much war news. They were really cut off from the world. Max begins the story of his great "crime." Max was discovered with a slice of warm bread. Max told Bartenschlager, "I'm one of your 500 Mongolians from Kraków."

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02:55:00

Max recalls the confrontation with Commandant Bartenschlager over warm bread. The head of the Jewish police, Gutstein, accompanied Max after whipping him, but they couldn't find the provider of the bread. They had no success after several days. This meant 25 lashes for Max. In December 1944, 2,000 inmates were sent away. In January, Bartenschlager told the approximately 1,500 remaining prisoners that the Russians were coming and they should all accompany him.

03:00:00

Bartenschlager left the camp at this time. Max and the group went to meet the Russians. A Jewish soldier told them where to go.

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They arrived in Radom, Poland and then in Lublin, Poland. They were liberated. Max wanted to return to Zmigrod. He hoped to find his family's hidden golden jewelry. He didn't find it.

03:05:00

Max took his father's machine from the Pole who had it. Max sold the machine in a neighboring town when he heard that the Pole was looking for him the night before, to kill him. Max left Zmigrod and went to Bucharest, Romania. After several months in Bucharest, Max wanted to get away from the Communists. He went to Italy to a camp in Padua. While in the camp in Padua, Max decided to take an apartment with a friend. Max endeavored to join an aunt in the United States. This was difficult, so he decided to go to Israel.

03:10:00

Anti-semitism in Poland was incredible. Max went to Israel, to a camp near Haifa, then to Tel Aviv. Max was in the army until the 1948 war was over. Max married another survivor in 1949. He worked for the government. Max's oldest son was born and then Max's American aunt sent him papers. Max wanted to be with his family. He came to the United States in 1955. He acclimated to America and now has a good family, both immediate and extended.

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03:15:00

Max cries as he describes his inability to sleep. "I have to return to Zmigrod to see graves of my parents." In 1972, Max received a call from the Jewish Congress (American Jewish Congress) to testify at a trial in Dramburg (Drasko Pomorskie), Poland which was not far from Chelm, Poland. This was a trial of Germans who killed Jews. Leo Rosner also testified. Max was at the trial for one week. He was very nervous. There were about 100 witnesses.

03:20:00

The trial was too emotional. Dr. Gans, the main man in Jaslo and its vicinity, committed suicide when they came to pick him up. Five people accused of murdering thousands of people were given light sentences. For example, five years in prison. Max felt very bad, worse than before, and could not sleep. Max, his oldest son, Leo Rosner, and a cousin from Paris, France, went to Poland. They visited Treblinka, a concentration camp in Poland, where they saw a map identifying Zmigrod as a place victimized during the war.

03:25:00

Took a taxi from Warsaw, Poland to Zmigrod. Max recognized a Polish neighbor who did not recognize him. Max went to the cemetery which was a forest with a mass grave. He was screaming and crying. He was imagining the Aktion. It was a very emotional experience. Max resolved to erect a memorial stone. Max looked for Warzyce, Poland, where his sister was murdered.

03:30:00

Max asked a local man to describe what happened. The man was 17 at the time. The man described the beating, screaming, crying, and killing. This person saw all the horrible events. The man identified the mass graves by towns. Max remembers saying Kaddish, screaming and crying.

03:35:00

Max had to go home to calm his nerves. Max shows a picture of the stone to be unveiled in town on July 7, 1993 and another of the plaque for the Warzyce forest. They were in three languages—Polish, English, and Hebrew. There were also biblical verses in Hebrew and English.

03:40:00

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Max discusses the roles of German, Ukrainian, and Jewish policemen and Poles. Max had a bad experience with Poles. "Why for a couple pounds of sugar would they turn me in to be killed?" A Pole hid two Jews for six months, for money, then he killed them. Max did not talk about Ukrainians at this time. Couldn't stop talking about Poles.

03:45:00

Max had no problem talking to his children and others about the Holocaust.

03:50:00

Max feels human beings can be very cruel and hopes it will not happen again. He feels he is observant until a certain point, but he has lost a lot of faith. Max observes holidays, Yahrzeit, and is a good Jew. Max feels this taping is one of his greatest achievements.