

**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**  
**Archives**

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

**Interview with Eva Laks  
May 2, 1990  
RG-50.002\*0038**

## **PREFACE**

On May, 2 1990 Eva Laks 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 Eva Laks**

**May 2, 1990**

Eva Laks was born in Ryki, Poland, on March 10, 1922, one of seven children of a ritual slaughterer and his wife. After a fire, her family moved to Janowiec nad Wisla, Poland. Eva remembers being subjected to Antisemitism there.

When the Germans came, a typhoid epidemic broke out, and the children in her family were affected by it. The Germans evacuated Janowiec nad Wisla and the family was sent to Zwolen, Poland. Soon after, Eva and her father were deported to concentration camps. Eva believes her father might have been sent to Chelmno, concentration camp in Poland. She was sent to Skarzyskow-Kammienna Concentration camp also in Poland. In 1944 the prisoners of Skarzysko-Kamienna were evacuated to Leipzig, Germany. When the time came for Leipzig to be evacuated, the prisoners were put on a forced march. The Russians overtook the column of prisoners and liberated them. Eva then went to Kraków, Poland, where she stayed in a hostel for former concentration camp victims. She got married and moved to Prague, Czechoslovakia and then Landesberg am Lech, Germany. She emigrated to the United States with her husband, moving to New Orleans in 1950. After the couple moved to New Jersey, her husband passed away. Eva remarried in 1976. She has two sons by her first husband.

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**Time-coded notes of the  
Interview with Eva Laks  
May 2, 1990**

01:00:00

Eva is making this tape for her children. She was born in Ryki, Poland on March 10, 1922. Ryki is not far from Warsaw, Poland. Ryki burned down when Eva was three years old. Eva's father moved the family to Janowiec nad Wisla, Poland. He was a shochet (ritual slaughterer). There were seven children in Eva's family. The boys of the family went to religious school. Because kosher slaughter was outlawed, Eva's father found it hard to make a living.

01:04:00

Eva began in secular school and later attended Beit Yakav. When her mother became ill, Eva had to leave school because, as the eldest, she was responsible for taking care of the family. There was Antisemitism in Janowiec nad Wisla. The Jews were told to "go to Palestine."

01:07:00

There were pogroms and violence, especially on Christian holidays. Eva was never personally attacked. Eva's mother had four siblings and her father had five. She saw her extended

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family on vacations. Her mother's brother was in Warsaw. Most of the time she went to her grandparents while on vacation.

01:10:00

When World War II broke out she saw airplanes fly by. The Germans took over and burned the Synagogue. Men who came by with pails of water to put out the fire were thrown into the blaze. When the Germans came to her house to get her father, he hid behind a door. A German shaved off Eva's father's beard.

01:13:00

Eva went to work at a number of jobs to feed the family. There was only enough bread to feed the younger children. The family moved into a room in the back of the synagogue. One day all of the children in the family got sick with typhoid. It was an epidemic. A male nurse came to take care of them. In 1941, they continued to work. Eva's father could not work and was put in jail overnight.

01:16:00

Many towns in the area of Janowiec nad Wisla were evacuated by the Germans. Eva's family was evacuated to Zwolen, Poland. A few days later they were taken to a marketplace. Eva and her parents had to go and the children were left alone. Eva never saw her siblings again. Though Eva and her father were sent to the

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concentration camps, her mother was sent home. Eva never saw her again.

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01:19:00

Eva and her father were put on trucks and beaten as they traveled. They were sent to Skarzyskow-Kamienna concentration camp in Poland. The men were placed on one side, the women the other. Eva's father was sent somewhere else. Eva does not remember the names.

01:22:00

Skarzyskow-Kamienna was one big barracks. Eva's father may have gone to Chelmno, Poland. She would not eat non-Kosher food. Eva made bullets. She was sent to the Hasag forced labor camp within Skarzyskow-Kamienna, where they were ruled over by 16 year-olds.

01:25:00

Once, Eva's father sent her bread along with a letter, but the letter was confiscated by the S.S. and she never heard from him again. On Yom Kippur, an announcement came that the inhabitants of Zwolen were being evacuated to Treblinka concentration camp in Poland. Eva didn't think her mother made it to the train. She knew that her father had been shot but she doesn't know what happened to her mother.

01:28:00

Eva always hoped that her father would come back. She hoped in vain. It took a year to build the male and female barracks in Skarzyskow-Kamienna. Conditions got much better when the barracks were built.

01:31:00

One day, Eva was too tired to wash the floors after 12 hours of work at the ammunition factory. She was told to do it another time. Two hours later, the S.S. came in to find out why the floor wasn't washed and she was beaten. She was put into the hospital with pneumonia two hours later.

01:34:00

Several days later the S.S. came into the hospital to select those close to death. Eva's girlfriends came in to warn her to sit in a chair or she would be shot. in 1944 Skarzyskow-Kamienna was evacuated. Eva had gone to wash the men's dirty clothes in order to get an extra serving of soup.

01:37:00

Eva had never been away from home and wanted only to tell her mother what she had suffered. In 1944, she was evacuated to Leipzig, Germany, where she worked making ammunition. The situation was very bad. The bread was inedible and the soup was



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merely water, but liberation was near. They had to work nonetheless.

01:40:00

An Allied bomb hit the barracks one day during an "appel." When they returned from work the next day, they were told that they were being evacuated.

01:43:00

Two of the women in Leipzig were pregnant. The S.S. woman warned them that if they did not reveal themselves, they would be forced to stand outside in wet uniforms which had just been washed. This took place during freezing weather. Finally, the women came out. They gave birth the next day. This was the day of Liberation.

01:46:00

Eva later saw these women in New York with their sons. During the evacuation, the prisoners were surrounded by burning buildings. It rained constantly. They were exhausted and hungry and did not know where to go. They marched with the Germans through the fields. Anyone who stopped for food or water without permission was shot. They stopped to rest, but the Germans soon insisted that they continue.

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01:49:00

After a while, people refused to go on. Ten girls went with them and a few minutes later there were shots. Soon the Russians came and this reassured them. The prisoners went to the other side of the Elbe river in Germany. They stopped at farms where each farmer took eight girls and fed them. An outfit of American soldiers arrived.

01:52:00

Two girls ate everything and got sick. More food had to be brought. The Russians told the Jewish girls to take bedrooms from the Germans who were bivouacked there. Eva weighed only 70 pounds at the time of her liberation. After five weeks they had to be repatriated. While the survivors were there, they had priority and the Russians couldn't take anything for their use.

01:57:00

Eva came to Kraków, Poland. There was a big house filled with people who had been in the concentration camps. Eva got straw for a bed and some bread. The next day she had to be registered so that information could be gathered about survivors.

02:01:00

None of her family had survived. She went to register in hope that someone would be looking for her. A man heard that she

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was from Ryki. They had gone to cheder together. The man asked her to marry him. Eva was shocked. She asked an elderly woman what to do. The woman told her to marry a Gentile and have a ready-made home. This she could not do.

02:04:00

Eva was finally persuaded to marry him. They went to a hostel for former concentration camp inmates in Prague, Czechslovakia. Her husband got sick and went to the hospital. Both of them had to live on her ration card. They lived on cabbage and potatoes. They went from Prague to Germany. It was just like travelling on cattle wagons.

02:07:00

They went to Landesberg, Germany, and stayed for five years. Her husband wanted to go to Israel, but she did not. She became pregnant and had a daughter who had leukemia and died. They registered with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and finally left Bremerhaven, Germany, in 1950.

02:10:00

They came to New York and were then sent to New Orleans. They had family, but she had no one. People tried to offer her things and a woman told her to just accept and say "thank you."

02:13:00

They saw shacks and poverty en route to their destination. They asked where the synagogue was. They did not know how to ask for breakfast and couldn't find a restaurant. Finally they found one and just asked what other people were having.

02:15:00

Eva's husband was taken for an IQ test. He became a mechanic and rose to become the chief sewing machine mechanic in all of Louisiana. Their son was born and her husband got a raise. They made friends with other refugees because there was no one else.

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02:19:00

The woman went to Munich, Germany. The husband wanted to move to Newark, New Jersey and the couple asked them to come there. She was working in a factory in New Orleans at night. They didn't see each other. Eva and her husband stayed in New Orleans for six years. Her husband was fired because Germans took over the Pfaff company where he worked.

02:22:00

Their son, Stewart, developed asthma. They came to Newark. While her husband worked at night, Eva wanted to change hours. Her boss made an Antisemitic remark and she quit her job to stay home.

02:25:00

Stewart was a good student in public school and in Talmud Torah. They sent their second son to Yeshiva. Their younger son is religious, but the older one is not. Later on they moved a number of times, finally to Hillside, New Jersey. Eva's husband died of a heart attack when her son, Carl, was 14.

02:28:00

After two years, Eva met her second husband. She asked her sons what to do and both agreed that she should marry again. Eva went to Israel and met her prospective husband's sister. Her

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prospective husband also had two children and the two households were merged into one when Eva married him on March 21, 1976.

02:31:00

Eva's children do not know her whole story. She has been very close to her sons since their father's death. Her son Stewart is a health economist and her other son Carl is an ophthalmologist.