United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Archives

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

Interview with Morris Rubell
March 7, 1989
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PREFACE

On March 7, 1989, Morris Rubell was interviewed on videotape by Bernard Weinstein and Sister Rose Thering 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 Morris Rubell

March 7, 1989

Morris Rubell was born on January 16, 1930 in Barycz, Poland. His town had about 20 Jewish families in it. He was the youngest of five children. His father was an innkeeper and a small farmer. Morris had just started school at age eight when the war broke out. In 1939, his family was deported to the Krosno ghetto about 40 kilometers from his home. En route, his father was beaten so badly that he died a few weeks later. Then Morris and his mother were sent to Rzeszow, a ghetto in Poland. They escaped from Rzeszow and traveled back to Krosno because the conditions were better there. In 1942, he was taken alone to Plaszow, a concentration camp in Poland. This was the last time he saw his mother. He describes his preoccupation with survival and sorrow in the concentration camps. In 1943, he was transported to Mauthausen, a concentration camp in Austria, as part of work group to clean streets. Then in late 1944, he was moved to Melk, a concentration camp in Austria. Then in March of 1945, he was marched to Ebensee, a concentration camp in Austria, where he felt the war was soon to end. Here he was liberated by the Americans, but he still feared the Germans would return. He traveled to Italy where he was reunited with his three sisters who survived Auschwitz, a concentration camp in Poland. His sister, Francisa, was liberated from Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp in Germany, with typhoid. She was taken to Sweden to recover. He then went to the Displaced Persons Camp in Linz, Austria to meet his brother Mark who survived in Russia. In 1947, he went to France because the Polish quota to the United States was exhausted. He moved to the United States in February of 1948 when his American cousin sponsored his immigration. He lives in Vienna, N.J. He is an industrial supplier. He is married with two sons.

Time-coded notes of the

Interview with Morris Rubell

March 7, 1989

01:00:00

When the war broke out, Morris was nine years old. Born in 1930, in Barycz, Poland, near the city of Krosno. There were five children in the family. He was the youngest. His father was an innkeeper. Morris had just begun public school when the Germans moved into their town. A few months after coming in, the Germans congregated Jews and put them into the ghetto, 90 kilometers away from where he was born. The ghetto was in Krosno. The family was coming into the ghetto when his father was seized and beaten so badly that he died.

01:04:00

The only ones in his family who were in the ghetto were his mother, his sisters, and himself. Before the war his town had about 20 Jewish families. Life was normal. His family was loving and caring. He had gone to a public school. Children began school at about age eight. He dreaded school because he was not accepted. Rocks were thrown at him and he was called names. They lived between large cities. The patrons of this father's inn were transients.

01:07:00

He remembers seeing fire and experiencing bombs falling. He tried to block out much of it. Within a month Jews were rounded up. They were taken from Krosno to Rzeszow. In 1941, he and his

mother ran away. Because conditions in Rzeszow were so terrible. He and his mother had to sweep streets. They managed to sneak away. They got back to Krosno by getting on the ghetto roster. They journeyed back to Krosno by going though the woods.

01:10:00

In both ghettos they slept in barracks on shelving. There were no beds and no straw. His mother was in a separate area. Conditions were bad; rations were meager. One had to stand in line to get food. Nobody wanted to know where they were going. People tried not to see or feel. In Rzeszow, people were being shot and thrown in ditches. There was a constant burning of firewood. People didn't want to believe such things went on as they existed.

01:13:00

He didn't know at the time that there were crematoria. In the ghettos there were hangings and tortures, but not mass murders. People were simply taken away in Rzeszow, however, people were killed in large numbers.

01:16:00

In 1942, he was in Plaszow, outside Cracow. He was there alone. His mother was no longer with him. He was twelve years old. They took the old and the weak. He managed to hide there till late 1943. His sisters, who survived, were in Auschwitz. His mother was separated from him in 1941. They never saw each other again.

01:19:00

Plaszow was a camp on a hill. There were beatings, particularly by Ukrainian blackshirts. There was always hope and a sense of humor. Although everyone was preoccupied by sorrow and survival. Each person tried to survive each day. One had no reason to believe he would live. But strangely, Morris had faith. Life was devoted to surviving even one more hour.

01:22:00

Life was regimented. You were pushed around by the SS, by Kapos. The latter doing most of the beating. The killing was done by the SS and blackshirts. You could not be close to anyone because people were certainly taken away, everyone constantly looked behind. Everyone was afraid.

01:25:00

The whole process was done by breaking one down physically, mentally, and psychologically. One's dignity was taken away. Things were hopeless, eventually people seemed less pained by fear of death. But by the fact they no one cared and some were even glad. Yet there was the desire to survive one more day.

01:28:00

He was both spurred on and demoralized by indifference that was the irony. There was hopelessness, yet hope. When there's nothing left you want to die. But you want to go on. Beatings always had a "reason" -- Too fast, too slow, etc. Every month or so you were called out on a

appfelplatz. You were selected to see which way you were going: to work or to death. Although you didn't necessarily know it was to death. Many people became unfit for work very quickly.

01:31:00

The counting went on to even when "shipments" were not taking place in the latter part of 1943. He was put on a cattle train to Mauthausen. He was in a "working" group whose job was to clean out streets. He was there for a month. From there he went to Melk. Where they were building tunnels for ammunition factories. Rations were terribly meager. People died of hunger.

01:34:00

The stench of death and the ongoing fires were characteristic of every camp. In March of 1945 , he was shipped to Ebensee. There was a feeling the war was coming to an end. They walked there for a week. Bombs were falling. In Ebensee, there was virtually no food. The loss of desire to live was great.

01:37:00

The beginnings of German demoralization, however, gave some cause for hope. It felt good to see the Germans humbled. Stilled many Jews died and this was purposeful. People sat in their own filth and debris. Now the SS fled. He remembers the American tanks breaking through the gates.

01:40:00

He'll never forget the haggard, but happy, faces of the Americans that became stunned by what they saw. They were not used to it.

01:43:00

They fed the prisoners too well and many died. They lifted and held the prisoners. Morris was 15 at the time and weighed about 65 lbs. There was still fear that the Germans were coming back.

01:46:00

One's sense of self worth and confidence was damaged. One felt the Germans were close behind. Germans who were still around or later caught were probably harshly treated. Inmates were not let near them.

01:49:00

He went to Italy about a month later because he thought this was the way to get to Israel. In Italy he found out that his three sisters survived. His sister Francisa was liberated in Bergen-Belsen with typhoid. Taken to Sweden where she was nursed back to life. Came here in 1949.

01:52:00

His brother Mark was in Russia and they came together in a displaced persons camp in Linz, Austria. The displaced persons camp was a temporary place where one could live until they found a permanent place. But they wanted to be a productive human being.

01:55:00

In 1947, he went to France because Polish quotas to the United States were exhausted. He went to the United States when his cousin brought him over in February of 1948. He did not really know how to handle freedom after the war. Any uniform made him queazy. But in the beginning freedom was not complete because one wasn't liberated from oneself.

01:58:00

He still had nightmares. It wasn't easy to adjust when he came here he saw intact families and educated people his age. He kept it to himself. He married, had children, but he only gradually began to go into detail about what happened.

02:01:00

His children knew there was something different. He had to tell them about their grandparents and family. During the holidays there was a reconnection.

02:04:00

His children will carry on memory of grandparents. His grandchildren, too, will know. There is a tug of war between optimism and pessimism. But was has to fool hope, but memory helping is not the answer? We have to resist lies and apathy, and we can't ignore anti-semitism.

02:07:00

He never expected there would be antisemitism after the Holocaust. We must counter by whatever means necessary. He is willing to fight back in any way.