

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Archives

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

**Interview with Joseph Weinbuch
March 30 and April 6, 1989
RG-50.002*0051**

PREFACE

On March 30 and April 6, 1989, Joseph Weinbuch was interviewed on videotape by Fredda Remmers 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 Joseph Weinbuch
March 30 and April 6, 1989

Joseph Weinbuch was born in 1924 in Kurów, Poland to a merchant and a nurse-homemaker. He has one brother and one sister. Joseph lived in the Kurów ghetto from 1939 until 1941 or 1942. In 1941, Joseph was sent to Janowska concentration camp in Lviv, Ukraine. After four months in Janowska, Joseph returned to his family in the ghetto.

After his family was driven from the ghetto by Ukrainians, Joseph hid in fields or forests around his home town. He depended mainly on himself. No one hid him willingly. Joseph also depended on older people because he felt that they were less anti-Semitic. Joseph lived in the fields from 1941 until 1944. For a brief time, Joseph was a member of Klemtivizu, a group of Jewish Russian army members.

Joseph was liberated in 1944. His mother survived but his father was killed by the Polish underground, the nationalistic Armia Krajowa. After the war, Joseph joined the Polish army. He later went to Austria and then to the United States in 1949. Joseph met and married his wife in the United States while living in Newark, New Jersey. They had three daughters and four grandchildren at the time of the interview.

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0051

1

**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Joseph Weinbuch
March 30 and April 6, 1989**

01:00:00

Joseph Weinbuch experienced his "Holocaust" in the thirties. He was born on December 5, 1924 in the town of Kuorv (Kurów), Poland, near Lublin, Poland. Joseph experienced a lot of anti-Semitism as a child. He witnessed beatings and disturbances. Joseph remembers rocks being thrown and beatings in school for no reason. He remembers that his mother wanted him to play the violin. Once, a music teacher hit him for playing the wrong note. Joseph suspects he was hit because he was a Jew. The teacher didn't beat Gentile children.

01:04:00

Joseph feels that it is necessary to treat people decently. He is conscious of what it was like to be hungry. He has always contributed to help feed people. Joseph remembers begging for a piece of bread. When he was in hiding, he had to eat sugar beets, carrots, etc. One farmer told Joseph that he'd give him what he needed.

01:07:00

Joseph's father was a merchant who had a general store. His father was a supplier to places like Warsaw, Poland. Joseph's father was extremely honest. People could hand him some amount of money and he always gave his money's worth back to them. Joseph had a brother and a sister. In

1941, Joseph, his mother, and his siblings were herded out of their home, along with many others. Joseph's mother told them to run away from the barbed wire enclosure where they were held in another town.

01:10:00

Joseph and his brother left. They went to their aunt, who also told them to run away. Joseph ran back to his town, but no one was there. He couldn't find his father. Joseph's father finally found them and took Joseph's younger brother with him.

01:13:00

Joseph was on his own. He worked on farms with other boys. A hunch-backed man gave him a sandwich with horse meat in it. He was so hungry that it didn't bother him. Once, Joseph climbed a cherry tree and ate cherries.

01:16:00

Joseph remembers that wintertime was the worst. He'd hide out in barns and stay there to keep out of the cold. No one knew that he was up there. Joseph sought out older people because young ones were more anti-Semitic. Joseph was almost always in the area of his home-town.

01:19:00

No one hid him willingly. Joseph's father and brother were hidden in return for money. Had Joseph

stayed with his father, all three would have been killed. Joseph feels his father and brother were protected because farmers and neighbors feared Joseph would take revenge if they were killed.

01:22:00

Joseph had shoes that didn't fit properly. He used to peel off sections of fertilizer bags for shoes and "clothing." Joseph was about 15 years old at the time. This was the winter. The summertime didn't bother him. If it rained, he'd take off what little clothing that he had and wait until it dried out.

01:25:00

Joseph used to wash his clothing in brooks. He always wanted to be clean. He drank from creeks. Once, he sat in a crevice, below which were marshes. It was raining heavily. He could see German tanks proceeding in the direction of the Soviet Union. He saw a person running.

01:28:00

A Jew named Abraham was hiding, along with his daughter, in the house of a farmer, not far from the marshes. Joseph ran down to him as Abraham was slowing down. The farmer hid Abraham for money. Abraham overheard that the farmer was planning to kill him and his daughter. The daughter could come with him, but Abraham probably decided to go back for her. Joseph believes that they were both killed. He never saw them again.

01:31:00

Joseph lived in fields from 1941 until 1944. Joseph's mother and sister were in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany. Prior to his escape in 1941, Joseph lived in the Kurów ghetto starting in 1939. Majdanek concentration camp, on the outskirts of Lublin, Poland, was not far from his home. In 1939, when the town burned down, Joseph's father was in the Polish army. Joseph took his mother, sister, and brother to the outskirts of town.

01:34:00

Joseph later tried to get back to the town, but everything was burned down. Only the cellar of their home remained. They realized that the Polish army was in disarray. Joseph's father came home from the army and rebuilt their home.

01:37:00

Joseph's maternal grandfather had four daughters. He gave each one a house as a dowry. When Joseph's father rebuilt their house, he combined his business space with his residential space. It remained this way until 1941. In 1941, the Germans became aggressive. Joseph was sent to dig trenches in a labor camp called Janesuw (Janowska concentration camp in Lviv, Ukraine). He was in this camp for four months.

01:40:00

Janesuw was operated by the Judenrat. The head of the Judenrat was the aforementioned Abraham. Joseph was sent back to Kurów. He contracted typhus. People who were sick were generally disposed of.

01:43:00

Joseph's mother was a midwife. People used to come to her for remedies. Joseph has no pictures of his family. His mother hid him in the basement of the house. She nursed Joseph back to health. They left in 1941-1942.

01:46:00

Joseph remembers being driven out of their town by Ukrainians in black uniforms. He considers what they did "unforgivable." He remembers these years as a time when Ukrainians would beat the elderly, the disabled, and young children. When the Ukrainians came for Joseph's family, it was around Easter. Once, a Ukrainian beat a child to death. Another time, an epileptic person stumbled and was killed by a Ukrainian guard.

01:49:00

All of this brutality made Joseph more determined to survive. When he got away, running through fields, he envied the animals. At one point in his escape, Joseph joined some Jewish ex-members of the Russian Army. Joseph remembers living with his father in the fields, subsisting on apples, sugar beets, etc.

01:52:00

One night, Joseph was especially hungry. They had about 20 people with them, including relatives

and friends. Joseph decided to go into town to get food. He traveled near a creek. He saw something moving and went closer. There was a bush swaying. Joseph saw a farm and went into the barn to go to sleep. He planned to wake up early the next morning and go into town.

01:55:00

Joseph overslept and awoke to the sounds of children going to school. They were yelling. They killed the Jews in the woods. The Germans, abetted by Ukrainians and Poles, probably killed them. Joseph realized that he would have been killed too.

01:58:00

From that point on, Joseph didn't want to be part of a group. There was one working camp in Kurów. A Jew headed that camp. Each person gaining entrance to that camp had to have 500 Zloty. Joseph remembers that you could survive by working on the roads. Joseph's father wanted him to go into the camp with him and his younger brother.

02:01:00

Joseph didn't want to live behind barbed wire. Neither Joseph nor his father joined the labor camp. A few weeks later, all the people in the camp were killed.

02:04:00

A Pole named Witkowski offered Joseph a job helping with chores. Witkowski's wife was a very

fine, compassionate woman. Joseph trusted her, but did not trust Mr. Witkowski. Joseph feared that Mr. Witkowski might give him away.

02:07:00

Joseph trusted no one. This was the key to his survival. One time, Mr. Witkowski came down to Joseph's place of work and warned him to leave because all the Jews had been killed the day before. Joseph left, but trusted Mrs. Witkowski and came back. One day, while Joseph was working, Mr. Witkowski told him, again, to get away. Instead, Joseph ran upstairs.

02:10:00

Had Joseph gone with Mr. Witkowski's orders, the Germans would have seen and killed him. Later, Joseph left the Witkowskis. Joseph looked Polish. He reached a bridge where there were Germans. No one stopped him and he got away. So, Joseph had managed to escape twice.

02:13:00

Joseph sensed that Mr. Witkowski was dangerous. Joseph did not go back to the Witkowskis. However, one day he went to the city because he had to find a hiding place for Jews. Joseph avoided houses and tried to stay only in the fields where he could hide.

02:16:00

While Joseph was wandering around, he found his mother's sister. She'd lost her son. Joseph took

his aunt with him because she'd been thrown out by a farmer who'd been sheltering her. Joseph's aunt stayed with him during the summertime. Meanwhile, the Polish underground robbed the place where the two Jews he was helping worked. They were making fur coats for the German army on the Russian front. The Germans were very angry about the robbery and surrounded the town.

02:19:00

One day, Joseph was stopped by two S.S. officers pointing bayonets. Joseph spoke Polish. They wanted to check him out. They took Joseph to the place where the coats were being made.

02:22:00

A policeman came in to check Joseph out. He recognized the aunt and called her by name. Joseph was caught in a lie. He recognized several people there. The policeman and the S.S. officers made Joseph stand against the wall. Suddenly, he ran as the Germans were shooting at him.

02:25:00

Joseph ran into a bush and hid there. He suddenly felt everything burning and realized he'd gotten into a poison ivy bush. Joseph's aunt was killed. Joseph later found out that the Jews were behind the wall.

02:28:00

Somehow, Joseph got away. He was troubled by the poison ivy. Joseph was told to urinate on a

piece of cloth and to place it on the burning places. That remedy helped. Joseph slept in fields, and got no food.

02:31:00

Joseph refers again to his envy of animals. Joseph believes he had to survive. His thinking was positive. He could have been killed at any moment.

02:34:00

One day, Joseph made a date to meet his father. The night before their scheduled meeting, he slept in a hay stack. What he saw, he didn't like. He saw three figures a few feet away. His father and brother came from the other side.

02:37:00

Joseph and his father and brother separated to run and hide under the elevation of the beet fields. They had to separate.

02:40:00

Joseph found his brother and later his father found them. Joseph remembers that a family couldn't stay together. Joseph's father had to go back to his hiding place. Often, the killers were Poles rather than Germans. It was actually better, Joseph feels, for families to split up.

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0051

10

02:43:00

Joseph feared Poles even before he feared Germans. He refused to trust. That's what enabled him to survive. Joseph regrets not trusting, but he always followed his instincts which he **did** trust.

02:46:00

Joseph's cousin was hiding in a basement where potatoes were stored. He and some others hid there. The neighbor knew they were hiding there and killed them. Joseph often has the urge to look at the place of his birth.

02:49:00

But, Joseph is afraid and this keeps him from doing anything. Although the Germans were gone, Polish hatred of the Jews remained. In 1941, the Germans got some Jews, including Joseph, together. 100 people were supposed to be killed. Because of snow, some vehicles couldn't go through. The prisoners were ordered to clear the road to Lublin.

02:52:00

Snow was drifting. You couldn't see anything. Most of the men were older than Joseph. They were thirsty. As Germans drove up, Joseph hid in a snow embankment. The Germans drove the others off, probably to be killed.

02:55:00

In the fields, Joseph often hid in cemeteries. Around Easter, Joseph saw the cemetery light up and he thought they were looking for him. Actually, they put candles on graves. After a while, Joseph left the area in fear.

02:58:00

After the war, Joseph's father was killed. Joseph's father had almost no enemies. He was not violent, but Poles killed him. Joseph's father was shot in the middle of the marketplace. The Armia Krajowa, the underground army, killed his father. The Armia Krajowa were nationalists.

03:01:00

He couldn't even pick up his father's remains. Joseph expresses anger about this. He remembers that Jews were hindered continually. Joseph could not get an education. He asks himself, Why? He couldn't understand why Christians hate Jews.

03:04:00

After processions, Christians used to attack Jews. Joseph feels that they must have been instigated in church. The people must have been damaged. Joseph recalls that he wasn't taught hate, so he can't bear to hate others.

03:07:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.002*0051

12

Joseph comments that there are many highly educated Christians who can be influenced by icons. He thinks that the image of a wounded, crucified Jesus is an incitement. Some people act as if the crucifixion occurred yesterday. The analogy for Joseph would be showing bodies of a crematorium in a synagogue.

03:10:00

The crucifixion, though it was created by Romans, was blamed upon Jews. Joseph urges that you have to be human. The Jews could put up icons of suffering too. That isn't religion though, it's a form of incitement.

03:13:00

The Jews in Poland didn't want anything except to be left alone. They were good citizens. Joseph's father served in the Polish Air Force. It is still a legacy today. The religious institution and religious leader has a tremendous responsibility.

03:16:00

Joseph recounts a visit, recent to the time of the interview, from Jehovah's Witnesses. He listened to them respectfully. He took their pamphlet and told them his story. He told them to go back to their families and churches and tell them to behave and not to incite others.

03:19:00

Joseph considers himself an atheist. He goes to synagogue with his children, but finds that he can't believe in "fiction." He believes in Moses, but not in a supernatural being.

03:21:00

Joseph was liberated in 1944. He had a choice to go into the Polish army under Russian supervision or to be taken to a compound in Lublin. Joseph was shipped out by truck toward the Vistula. He went with about 500 other people. They went to the Prague (Czech Republic) side of the Vistula. They were cleaning up pockets of German.

03:25:00

Joseph came to a woman's camp near Katowice, Poland. He went to Katowice. Finally, he was close to the German border. When his father was killed, Joseph deserted the army. Joseph found out about his father's death when he went to observe conditions at a railroad station. He got a note from someone whom he couldn't remember saying that his father was dead.

03:28:00

Joseph remembers that his father was helpful to everyone. Joseph couldn't even claim his father's body after he was shot. Joseph deserted the army and went to Łódź, Poland. Joseph's brother was with him in Łódź. From Łódź, they went to Bratislava, Slovakia. Joseph's brother went on to Israel and then came to the United States. His brother had a tumor in his head. At the time of the interview, Joseph's brother lived in Florida. Joseph is in contact with his brother. Both have three daughters.

03:31:00

Joseph doesn't understand hatred. Joseph tries not to engage himself with people who are hateful. He and his brother went as "Greeks" over the border to Bratislava. They then went to Vienna, Austria, then to Welz (Wels), Austria, and then to Salzburg, Austria. Joseph was sitting there waiting for papers to the United States. Joseph arrived in the United States on February 27, 1949. A cousin took him in temporarily.

03:34:00

Joseph lived in Newark, New Jersey. He still remains close to the cousin that took him in. He feels a sense of loyalty to her because she helped him. He then rented a room and remembers feeling well-treated. He belonged to a Landsmanschaft. Joseph met his wife at a UJA (United Jewish Appeal) dance. He remembers that he didn't want to be introduced; he liked to do things on his own.

03:37:00

Coincidentally, they could converse in German. Joseph found her attractive. They dated and got married. He considers himself independent. His daughters are successful. Rita is married to an attorney, Lorraine to a Star Ledger executive, and Debbie to a doctor. Two of them are music teachers and one of them is a nurse. At the time of the interview, Joseph had four grandchildren with a fifth on the way.

03:40:00

One of Joseph's grandchildren is named for his father. Joseph encouraged his children to study music. He spent time with his children. He put a lot of effort into business, but his family was primary.

03:43:00

Joseph tried to talk about his past with his children. When their attention wandered, he simply walked away. He hopes they'll listen to the tape. His children got along. They all relate to each other. His oldest daughter is very thoughtful. Joseph doesn't let things fester.

03:46:00

Joseph was a strict, but fair, father. He always told his daughters to pay their way and to not be dependent. His children were always obliging and considerate. Joseph doesn't permit violence or horror in his house. He'd rather watch nature than human violence.

03:49:00

Joseph considers his daughter Lorraine a unique person. He appreciates her efforts in setting up this interview.