

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Archives

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

Interview with Margie Appel
April 1, 1993
RG-50.002*0065

PREFACE

On April 1, 1993, Margie Appel was interviewed by Phyllis Tobin 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 Margie Appel
April 1, 1993

Margie Appel was born in Klecenov, Slovakia on August 13, 1928. Her father was a cattle dealer who served in the Austro-Hungarian Army during World War I. There were nine children in the family, seven boys and two girls. She remembers experiencing some Anti-semitism in her public school. In 1939, the Hungarians occupied the area and by 1941 all of the town's men were forced into labor. Margie's family remained there until 1944 when the Germans moved them to the ghetto in Munkács, formerly Czechoslovakia, now Ukraine. After a month, the family was shipped to Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland where they were separated from each other. Margie's parents were sent to the gas chambers and she, her brothers, and sister were taken into forced labor. After six weeks in Auschwitz, Margie and her sister were sent to Gelsenkirchen concentration camp in Germany where they worked on barges and then to Essen concentration camp in Germany to work in the Krupp factories. When the factories were bombed, Margie and her sister were transferred to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany. There, they were reunited with their brothers, and later liberated by the British. Margie married her first husband on August 27, 1946. Before emigrating to the United States in 1949, she spent time in Celle, Germany and Garbersee displaced persons camps in Germany. Margie currently

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resides in New Jersey with her second husband. She has two sons from her first marriage and two grandchildren.

**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Margie Appel
April 1, 1993**

01:00:00

Margie Appel was born in 1928 in Klecenov, Slovakia. Her household consisted of 9 children, 7 boys and 2 girls, her parents, and her 94-year-old grandfather. Margie attended public school in Klecenov. She remembers experiencing some Antisemitism in public school. Margie also remembers that being Jewish was tremendously important in her community. There were about 45 Jewish families in her community, all orthodox. Margie's father was a cattle dealer. They first sensed danger in 1941. She heard her father say that things were not good. Boys and men were taken away for forced labor by the Hungarians who had come in 1938. Margie's father had served in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I.

01:06:00

In 1938, Hungarians occupied Czech cities. In 1939, Czech soldiers ran away. Most Gentile people supported the Hungarians. Jews were apprehensive; they were the only group mistreated. Margie had to get out of school in the sixth grade. Her brothers were sent into forced labor. Margie shows photographs of her brothers taken in 1942 or 1943.

Margie and her sister had to help their parents. She remembers that her parents were sad, but her father was more optimistic than her mother.

01:11:00

Margie's youngest brother came to Auschwitz with them. Margie's father was gassed in Auschwitz. Margie saw three of her brothers after the liberation of Bergen Belsen concentration camp in Germany. One brother had been captured by Russians and one was at the front, and one was in Hungary. Margie stayed at home until 1944. She heard that Jews were being gathered and shipped away. The family awoke on the day after Passover; bread was still in the oven. The Germans were there. Margie saw people passing by with bundles over their shoulders.

01:16:00

A sheriff's son called over to Margie's father and offered to hide her, her sister, and her youngest brother. Margie's father refused. Thanks to the sheriff's son, they were allowed to finish baking their bread so that they could have something to eat. When they got to the ghetto in Munkács, Hungary, people were being beaten and chased by the Germans. Margie's mother used their bedspreads reserved for holidays because she didn't think that they would not have any more

holidays in their lifetime. They all lived in an attic and slept on the floors. There was no water for washing. Margie's mother cut off her braids.

01:21:00

Margie's brother was tortured for being late for curfew. A soldier once felt sorry for them and let Margie go to the head of the line to get bread. Margie's grandfather was dragged out of bed and was taken away. Five brothers were beaten and brutally treated while they were waiting in the temple to be sent to the ghetto. The family's jewelry and prayer shawls were taken. Later, a Hungarian risked his life by smuggling these items into the ghetto and returning them to the family so that they could trade them in for bread. They were in Munkács ghetto for one month.

01:26:00

On the way to the train, one brother was beaten for carrying a coat. On the train, nobody was given water nor bathroom space. Once, Margie saw a sunrise from the window and wondered why their hearts had to be so heavy amidst all the beauty. In Auschwitz, they grabbed the men, and she never saw her father again. A man warned the women to give their children over to the older women. They were constantly pushed.

01:31:00

Men told the young to say that they were older and the elderly to say that they were younger. Margie's mother soon disappeared. Margie is still angry at herself that she didn't look to see which way her mother was taken. Margie saw her brothers taken away to forced labor. Margie and her sister came to Dr. Josef Mengele's table and he asked her sister if they could work. Margie's sister said yes. Five siblings were in forced labor. Margie's father was a World War I invalid and was gassed. Margie and her sister were shaved all over their bodies. Margie saw a friend of her mother's. Margie was "jealous" because her mother wasn't there. One girl refused to leave her mother and was gassed with her.

01:36:00

Margie was beaten by the Kapos because she was complaining that she was issued a black and white sock. They got grey prison dresses. There were ten girls in one bunk bed. It was the first night she spent without her parents. The next morning, she and her sister were taken to a different area where they knew virtually no one. Margie remembers standing in line for roll call. They were given coffee in the morning and watery soup in the afternoon. Margie couldn't eat, she

wondered about her parents. A Kapo pointed to smoke and told that her parents had been burned.

01:41:00

Margie's sister was mentally affected by her experiences. Margie and the others were taken to "showers" but then she was taken out of the line. Margie had several close calls with the gas chambers. After six weeks, they were told that they were being sent to Germany. Margie's sister went with her. They were sent to Gelsenkirchen concentration camp in Germany. There, they worked on barges. Margie saw Hungarian girls being beaten because they could not handle a shovel properly. Margie, small and thin, volunteered to work for them. The guard took pity on Margie; the two girls were saved.

01:46:00

The front was getting closer. There, things were a little better. One day, a selection took place. The group was separated. Margie worried about her sister. The overseer allowed her sister to stay with her. They were sent to Essen concentration camp in Germany to work in the Krupp factories. Margie complained about bed bugs. Because Margie and others were needed for labor, they were accommodated and the bed bugs were removed.

01:51:00

Margie worked on springs for tanks. She was given food to be productive. Margie's sister refused to work. Margie did her work and her sister's. Sometimes, both were beaten. But, she had to protect her sister. Margie considers herself lucky because when she was in the camp, the factory was bombed, and when she was in the factory, the camp was bombed. Shells were exploding all around them.

01:56:00

They tried to get into a shelter. The Germans wouldn't allow it. The shelters were bombed. One hundred and fifty people were killed. They were in Essen for six months. None of the 500 prisoners were killed by bombs. They had to leave Essen because of bombing.

02:01:00

There was one particular camp officer who was quite humane. He told them about holidays. Margie fasted on Yom Kippur. She also said the Shma' every day. Her sister was mentally unbalanced. Margie was sent to the train and then traveled nine days. She saw other prisoners who were in much worse shape. During transit, her sister took away her bread. But,

Margie was unable to be angry with her; she never fought with her. She cried and cried. A friend gave her a bite of her bread. Sometimes, they were let off the train so they scoured the fields for vegetables. Eventually they came to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany. They stopped some distance from the camp and had to walk to the gate. They saw life proceeding "normally" in the environments of the camp.

02:06:00

When they entered the camp, the Lager Commander told them, "Now you will know you are Jewish prisoners." They saw their three brothers, who recognized them. Bergen-Belsen was worse than any other camp. Later, during the liberation, a soldier remarked that he'd seen the "walking dead." Wherever she saw a corpse, she thought it was one of her brothers. One morning, a few weeks later, she saw lights and heard no orders for morning roll call. She realized that they were free, but they were told to stay put. If someone went for food, Hungarian soldiers shot them. Margie decided not to go for food.

02:11:00

The next day, the British came. One officer couldn't look at them. She wouldn't go out until it was safe. People had

been relieving themselves in the street. The atmosphere was chaotic. Margie's sister went out and got potatoes, but wouldn't give her any. Germans had plans to burn down Bergen-Belsen to destroy evidence. British soldiers gave her a piece of chocolate. She gave it to her sister. The Red Cross (The International Committee of the Red Cross) came to take care of them. All three brothers who were in Bergen-Belsen died.

02:16:00

Margie was brought to Celle, Germany, near Bergen-Belsen. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt visited this camp., and Margie spoke briefly with her. Margie's sister took everything away from her. Margie knew something was wrong with her. She learned that three of her brothers were still alive. She and her sister started to travel home. All Margie wanted were two dresses. Today she will "bite [her] tongue" when she finds herself saying, "I have nothing to wear." They came home. They met her surviving brothers and sister-in-law. Margie wanted some relief from the burden of her sister.

02:21:00

Margie came with one brother to the village of Klecenov for a wedding. Margie couldn't look at the house. She met the sheriff and his son who wanted to hide her. The son told her

it didn't matter anymore if one were Jewish or Gentile; they could marry. Margie was deeply hurt and couldn't speak to him any more. Margie heard that the borders were closing. She was taken, by a brother, to a part of Czechoslovakia not overrun by Hungarians.

02:26:00

Margie's sister married and went to Germany but it was not a happy marriage. Margie met a man in 1945 in Most in the Czech Republic. He was a survivor. Borders were closing again. The man wanted to take Margie with him. Margie's older brother objected. They got engaged and then married on August 27, 1946. They lived in Garbersee, Germany in a displaced persons camp until 1949. Margie was relieved that her sister had left.

02:31:00

Margie was pregnant in Germany. She had twins, She knew very little about giving birth. She refused to inhale ether. Margie heard, "She is finished" and thought she was dead. She didn't realize she had given birth to twins. One twin died from pneumonia seven weeks later. In 1949, she came to the United States, to Boston, but doesn't remember why. She came to the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society of America. She was placed in a welfare hotel. They had a

wealthy uncle in the United States, but he did little for them.

02:36:00

Margie's brother lived in New Jersey, so they moved there. Margie's sister lived in Lakewood, New Jersey. She had three children and had relapses of mental illness. Her sister went to a "home" after her husband died. Margie's brother moved to Pennsylvania. In 1954, Margie and her husband bought a grocery store in Irvington, New Jersey.. They lived above the store. At this time, they had two sons. In 1970, they went to Israel for a wedding. It was the best time of their lives.

02:41:00

Both sons went to in college. The younger son was physically attacked by African-Americans in a racial incident. Because of this, he wanted to drop out of Rutgers. One Friday night in December, Margie called the store and heard a noise. She heard her husband say, "get out." She ran downstairs and found him unconscious. She didn't realize at the time that he'd been shot in a hold-up.

02:46:00

Margie was told by a doctor in the hospital that her husband was "deceased." She didn't know this word's meaning. Finally, he said, "he passed away." She was alone for two years. She met a man who was also a survivor. They married and have been together since. Margie's younger son returned to school; getting a masters degree in hospital administration. Both sons work with emotionally disturbed children. Margie has two grandchildren.

02:51:00

Margie cried for many years; she can't cry anymore. She thinks she survived mostly by fate. Margie and her first husband were going to go to Israel for their 25th anniversary, but decided to go in November. He was killed in December 1970. Margie considers the trip fate. Margie feels that there must be a reason for things: People survived so that Judaism could grow again.