

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Archives

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

Interview with Henry Yungst  
May 18, 1987  
RG-50.002\*0069

## **PREFACE**

On May 18, 1987, Henry Yungst 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 Henry Yungst**  
**May 18, 1987**

Henry Yungst was born in Ozorków, Poland on October 7, 1920. His father owned a textiles factory. His family did not experience any Antisemitism until the beginning of 1939. At that time, Henry and his family were taken out of their home and confined to a single room with no toilet facilities. Henry wanted to get away but he didn't want to leave his family. He was transported to work in Danzig in Poland where he worked on the Autobahn and railroads. When the camp became overcrowded, Henry was moved to Palemonas concentration camp in Lithuania. By the time he was moved to Kaiserwald concentration camp in Riga, Latvia there were only 23 survivors left from Palemonas. At Kaiserwald, Henry assisted in the building of airplanes. After six months, he was transported by boat to Stutthof concentration camp in Germany. From there, he was sent to Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany where he was reunited with his cousin and uncle. He was sent to Bochumer Verein concentration camp in Germany and then returned to Buchenwald. He stayed briefly in Flossenbürg, Germany before being put on a train to Dachau concentration camp in Germany. He was liberated by the American Army and sent to a hospital in Straubing, Germany where he settled and met his wife. He tried to find his sister in Israel before emigrating to the United States in 1954.

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**Time-coded notes of the  
Interview with Henry Yungst  
May 18, 1987**

01:00:00

Henry was born in Ozorków, Poland on October 7, 1920. There were 45,000 people in his town, one third of them were Jewish. The community had access to religious and cultural life. Life was good. The people were well-off. There were no signs of Antisemitism. At the beginning of 1939, there was a change in attitude towards the Jews on the part of the Poles. It was reflected in phrases such as, "Jews, why don't you go to Palestine?"

01:06:00

Henry's father owned a textile factory. At the beginning of the war, there was looting even by his father's "faithful" employees. People were collected so that they would all be together. The family was taken out of their home and confined to a single room without toilet facilities. Volkdeutsch (Polish citizens of German background) were given their home. Once, Henry's mother was beaten when she complained that everything had been taken away. Henry

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was sent to buy bread but the bread was stolen from him when a Pole informed on him.

01:11:00

At one point, Henry wanted to get away but he did not want to leave his family. He wanted to be a textile engineer. He went to Łódź, Poland but found that schooling had been curtailed for him and his brothers. On April 1, 1940, Jews in Ozorków were rounded up and sent to a movie house. At first, they were treated civilly but then brutally. He was sent to Danzig (Gdansk, Poland). His father and older brother were sent to a concentration camp in Poznan, Poland, where they died of starvation. His mother, sister, and younger brother were sent to the Łódź ghetto and were later gassed at the Chelmno concentration camp in Poland.

01:16:00

In Danzig, he worked on the Autobahn and railroads. A direct rail route was being built to the Soviet Union. All laborers were reasonably well treated because they needed workers. He was not guarded by the SS but rather by paramilitary civilians. He had a bad experience. He got some bread from a woman. He ate some and then tried to hide the rest but had no place to store it. An

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officer wanted to know who had given him the bread but he would not tell. He was lashed at intervals with an oxhide whip, sometimes 25, sometimes 50 times. His skin was numbed.

01:21:00

A foreman felt sorry for him and cared for him. After a few days, he felt better. He was sent to another camp because the first camp became overcrowded. He saw families from Vilna (Vilnius, Lithuania). It was peaceful until the SS came in. They made parents give up their children. Children and babies were flung into trucks. One mother did not want to give up her child. She was taken with the children to Poneriai, Lithuania where they were killed. Children up to 12-13 years old were killed. Women nearly went crazy. The sick were taken, too. Henry was sent to Palemonas concentration camp in Lithuania where people were hanged by Germans and Ukrainians for no other reason than to intimidate the prisoners.

01:26:00

The Ukrainians were killers. One particular Ukrainian was "Peter the Terrible." When Henry left Palemonas, there were only twenty three people alive. The camp was surrounded by woods. Prisoners

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were made to view dead bodies before they could eat. Many tried to escape to look for the partisans. These escapees were brought back dead. Here, there was no assurance that if one minded one's own business, he would be left alone.

01:31:00

Henry was sent to Riga-Kaiserwald, which was a big concentration camp in Latvia. He helped build airplanes. He saw two Russian attack planes. He did not care if he got killed by the planes. One plane crashed into Kaiserwald on a suicide mission. The prisoners, although unable to show it, were happy as they watched the camp burn.

01:36:00

Henry spent six months in Kaiserwald and was taken from there to Stutthof concentration camp in Germany. They were taken in boats. Two boats sank because of the excessive number of prisoners. Stutthof did not contain only Jews. It contained criminals who were unleashed by their captors on Jewish prisoners. He was beaten but he tried not to get sick.

01:41:00

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From Stutthof, Henry was taken to Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany where he encountered his cousin. His cousin had nearly died of starvation; he had lost the will to live. Henry helped by telling his cousin that he would soon be liberated. He tried to bring him food. He also recognized an uncle who had come from the Dora concentration camp in Germany. He felt that this could not go on forever. He was sent next to Bochum Verein concentration camp in Germany. He saved food because he felt he might need it the next day.

01:46:00

In Bochum Verein, he volunteered to work outside the camp to defuse bombs. German political prisoners were no longer available to work on them. It was dangerous but he did not care because he got food. His captors were not the SS. They treated them comparatively well. If you were killed, at least, it was an "easy death."

01:51:00

They went to a bombed area where they found herrings, elsewhere they found potatoes. He and a friend who survived with him, were



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able to eat. He had little concern for the future. He was too weak physically and mentally. He did not know about his family at the time. He found out years later while watching *Shoah* how his mother, sister, and younger brother died. He realized when they were being taken from the Russian front that things were changing.

01:56:00

Henry returned to Buchenwald. During his second time there, several tried to escape. They were either electrified or hung. An informer was lynched after he returned to Buchenwald because he "squealed" on an escapees in another camp. Henry was sent for a very short time to Flossenbürg, Germany but then the Germans began to take them to Dachau, a concentration camp in Germany.

02:01:00

Henry was fearful that the inmates might be killed. He escaped into an underground area. It was cold and he looked for a place where he could lie down. He did not know where the opening was. He finally found one. No one was in the barracks. He picked up a piece of blanket that had the name "Henryk" on it. This was his disguise. He started out for Dachau under disguise.

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02:06:00

It was raining. He saw American tanks. They were throwing out food and cigarettes. He could not reach anything. He was weak and sick. He got typhus and was taken to a makeshift hospital. He was given an oversized suit and hat. He resembled a skeleton. He was sent to another hospital in Straubing, Germany. He didn't know he was a man. His feelings were dead. American soldiers asked who would like to work for the American army? He got a job and went to the city. He worked for the government and lived in the house of a former Nazi.

02:11:00

Henry went into a depression. The wife of the former Nazi helped him get over it. He started to feel optimistic again. He met his wife when she visited Straubing. Today, he and his wife have three children, two daughters, Eda and Hella, and a son, Paul. He tried to find his sister. He looked for her in Israel but he could not find her. He had a small textile factory in Straubing. He thought of bringing it to Israel. He went back to Straubing but finally sold the factory.

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02:16:00

Henry came to the United States in 1954. His wife's sister lived in Newark, New Jersey and they lived with her. He bought a home in Hillside, New Jersey and a delicatessen in Union, New Jersey. Now, he is semi-retired. His son is a doctor. His children are all married. They all know about what happened. His son wants to know everything. Henry feels that people should be aware about what happened in Germany and that it could happen again overnight. He urges us to be watchful.