

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Archives

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

**Interview with Harold Zelmanovics
December 4, 1992
RG-50.002*0079**

PREFACE

On December 4, 1992, Harold Zelmanovics was interviewed on videotape by Joseph J. Preil 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 Harold Zelmanovics
December 4, 1992

Harold Zelmanovics was born in Svaliava, Ukraine on June 11, 1921. His family consisted of his parents, four brothers, and three sisters. Of the entire family, only one of his two brothers and two of his sisters survived. Hungarians occupied the area in 1939 following the outbreak of the war. Harold describes the restrictions and hardships that were forced upon the Jewish population. He became an electrician at the age of seventeen and did much work in his home town until 1942. In October 1942, he was shipped by cattle car on an eight hour trip to Komarom, Hungary for forced labor as an electrician. He was then transferred for forced labor to Budapest, Hungary in March 1943. In December 1944, he was shipped on an eighteen day cattle car trip to Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. He was assigned to a group whose job was to repair cattle cars. They slept in the cars for four or five months. In April 1945, Harold marched with the Buchenwald prisoners to Dachau, a concentration camp in Germany and was liberated there by the Americans eight to ten days later. After liberation, Harold lived in the Sudetenland, German occupied Czechoslovakia, for one year, then for three years in Bavaria, Germany in the American zone where he worked as an electronics instructor for United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. He married in the Sudetenland in 1945. He arrived in the United States in 1949 and has lived in New Jersey since then, working as an electrician.

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**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Harold Zelmanovics
December 4, 1992**

01:01:00

Harold resides in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He shows pictures he obtained in 1945 at Dachau concentration camp in Germany from the American army. He repaired a military truck and then requested the pictures. "I'm part of the game."

01:06:00

He concluded comments on the pictures. He was born on June 11, 1921 in Svaliava, Ukraine. The population was about 10,000, 35-40 percent were Jews. His siblings included three sisters and three brothers. His father was placed in a forced labor camp while his mother, two brothers, and one sister died in Auschwitz, a concentration camp in Poland. His father died of starvation and hard labor. Two sisters and one brother survived. All are now living in the metropolitan New York area and one sister in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

01:11:00

The situation was good under President Masaryk of Czechoslovakia but deteriorated under the Hungarians and Germans. When World War II began in 1939, there were restrictions. There was not enough food, especially for Jews. They knew about what was happening in Poland, 40-60 miles

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away. Harold attended public school for twelve years. He attended religious school as a child and continued to take three hours of religious education after starting public school.

01:16:00

At age 17, Harold became an electrician. He worked as an electrician until 1942 in his town. Hungarian occupiers confiscated Jewish businesses. They would take Jews for forced labor in the town for various jobs.

01:21:00

In October 1942, he was sent away to a forced labor camp in Komarom, Hungary near the Czech border. He was shipped on an eight hour railroad trip by cattle cars. He was assigned to electrical work in the tunnel. Morning rations consisted of soup, black coffee, and one slice of bread. Noon rations consisted of barley soup containing some meat and a piece of bread. At night, he received noodles or spaghetti.

01:26:00

The quantity of food in Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany and Dachau concentration camp in Germany was almost the same but the quality was not. He worked in the tunnels. Others worked on bridges and on railcars. He was only kept alive because he told the truth, he was an electrician. He was shipped to Budapest, Hungary in March 1943 and was housed there in a military shop.

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01:31:00

There were about 350-400 people in Komarom. There were about 500 in Budapest, and the routine was similar. He remained there for forced labor until November 1944, then shipped to Buchenwald by cattle car for eighteen days and eighteen nights, under indescribable conditions. This journey was his worst experience during the war.

01:36:00

He arrived in Buchenwald on Christmas Eve, 1944. He learned from the guards that the Germans were losing the war. His number was "27.769." He stayed in Buchenwald for one or two nights, then on the cattle cars. His group was assigned to repair work. This lasted for four or five months. He was with a group of twelve men during this time. He did good work and cooperated in order to stay alive.

01:41:00

He marched from Buchenwald to Dachau under a German guard during April 1945. This took about 8-10 days. They walked at night and rested during the day because the Germans feared American bombing. He does not know how many marched. Practically everyone survived the march, evidently a reasonably healthy group. After liberation, they were taken to Prague on General Motor trucks. During a physical examination, he passed out and was hospitalized for two to three weeks. He had a reaction to some canned meat.

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01:46:00

Harold found his maternal uncle, who took him to his apartment. His uncle provided him with living quarters in the Sudetenland where he obtained a job as an electrician. He was there for one year and then he and others left for the American zone in Bavaria, Germany. They did not care to stay under the Russians. During the year he was in Sudetenland, he found his two sisters and one brother. They remained there when Harold left.

01:51:00

Eventually, his brother joined Harold again and left for Israel. Harold was an electrical instructor in Bavaria for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA). He was housed in a big building for 300 and food was also provided by UNRRA. It was an empty life, but there was no danger now. Everybody wanted to go to Israel or the United States to build a future. He was married in 1945 in the Sudetenland.

01:56:00

Harold's wife's uncle in Freehold, New Jersey sent an affidavit. After a few weeks in Freehold in 1949, they moved to Newark, New Jersey for eleven years. Then, they moved to the Union-Elizabeth community in New Jersey and have been there for twenty five years. He was always

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ready to talk about the Holocaust. People asked him questions. The Holocaust did affect his faith at the beginning.