

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Archives

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

Interview with Hugo Princz
February 17, 1987
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PREFACE

On February 17, 1987, Hugo Princz was interviewed on videotape by Carole Shaffer-Koros 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 Hugo Princz
February 17, 1987

Hugo Princz was born in Silvas, Czechoslovakia (Slivnik, Slovakia) on November 20, 1922. He came from an economically comfortable, close-knit family of eight children. Hugo's father was a businessman who had American citizenship. His father returned to Czechoslovakia and could not emigrate after the beginning of the war because the American embassy and the Roosevelt administration refused to help.

Hugo's parents and all but one sibling, who died earlier, perished in the Holocaust. An older brother, who had escaped to Hungary, died near the end of the war. Hugo was interned in Majdanek and Birkenau, I.G. Farben slave labor camp at Auschwitz, and Waldlager concentration camp in Poland. While in Birkenau Hugo worked in the crematoria

At the end of the war, Hugo was briefly held at Feldafing displaced persons camp in Austria. He came to the United States at the end of 1946 and has since then pursued reparations payments from Germany.

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**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Hugo Princz
February 17, 1987**

01:00:00

Born November 20, 1922. Hugo came from a small community of about 1,000 people named Silvas (Slivnik, Czechoslovakia) in Slovakia. Hugo attended both public and Hebrew schools. Everybody in the Jewish community was Orthodox. They led a normal life. Czechoslovakia was a prosperous democracy. Hugo's family was economically comfortable. Hugo was one of eight children. His father ran two general stores, and owned 50 acres of land and 100 acres of forest from which he sold trees for lumber. Hugo's father was quite successful in his business. Hugo remembers that everyone was hard-working. Hugo recalls one pre-war tragedy—his brother's death in an accident.

01:06:00

Hugo's family was very close. He couldn't imagine leaving or losing his family. Hugo remembers Jews and non-Jews as generally friendly in Silvas. He does recall, however, some episodes of anti-Semitism prior to 1938. In 1938, the Slovakian government was established under the Nazis. Laws were established against

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the Jews. Kosher slaughtering was no longer allowed. Businesses were taken away from Jewish owners. Friends turned against Jews. This particularly shocked Hugo because his family members were hard-working and good citizens. They experienced threats to their business, which was eventually taken over by Slovaks of the Hlinka Party (Hlinková Guard).

01:11:00

Hlinka was an anti-Semitic ideologue who was already dead by this time. His name was lent to the Hlinková Party. The Hlinková Party never saw a German in Slovakia. All enforcement of laws was carried out by Slovaks. Hugo recalls that they didn't see Germans until they passed through Slovakia en route to Poland. Hugo's father was aware of what was to come. He had lived in the United States and had American citizenship. Hugo's father returned to Slovakia when his father, Hugo's grandfather, was dying. The American embassy, however, didn't allow the family to emigrate. Nothing was done to assist the family when Jews were accused of killing a forest ranger. Hugo expresses feelings of bitterness about the general American ambivalence to the plight of the Jews.

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Hugo recalls that they felt a sense of betrayal at the reluctance of the Americans to help them. Hugo's father lost his citizenship papers when he went into the army in World War I. The American embassy in Budapest, Hungary, promised that his misplaced passport would be returned. Secretly, Hugo's father went to Budapest to obtain a new passport. After some months, Hugo's father received word that although the State Department approved his passport, he couldn't get it because they didn't have boat tickets.

01:21:00

At the time when the forest ranger was shot, both Hugo and his brother were arrested, along with other Jews. Jews were arrested until a derelict admitted to the killing. The police were brutal; they beat Hugo's older brother when he tried to arrange a meeting with their sister, who lived in Hungary, at the Hungarian border. Hugo feels that anti-Semitism was church-inspired. Hugo calls them "religious bigots." Policemen and 40 citizens surrounded Hugo's family's home one day and ordered everyone to leave.

01:26:00

Hugo's family was sent to another town. The same policeman who took Hugo away was still in uniform when Hugo was liberated. Hugo recalls seeing his younger brother in Auschwitz, concentration

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camp in Poland, and tried to help him, but in vain. Before going to Auschwitz, Hugo's family was sent to Lublin, Poland. At the time, Slovakia was governed by President/Archbishop Tiso. Hugo's family traveled to the Polish border where the S.S. took over. The S.S. were brutal. This was Hugo's first encounter with the S.S. Hugo's family traveled several more days until they arrived in Lublin.

01:31:00

Hugo's parents gave their children most of their belongings. However, everything was taken away from them in Lublin. Hugo's parents were sent to Treblinka, a concentration camp in Poland. The children were sent to Auschwitz. Hugo's two brothers were in Auschwitz at the same time as he was, but they hardly saw each other. Hugo's older brother was selected after hurting his foot in Buna, a concentration camp in Poland. This brother had worked in a forced-labor detachment called "Kanada," arranging possessions of those arriving in Auschwitz. Hugo worked as a bricklayer. He had to repair existing buildings as well as work on new buildings.

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Hugo worked at Buna for I.G. Farben. He also worked on road construction. Hugo received, however sparse, better quality food than the prisoners in Auschwitz. Occasionally, a friend smuggled extra food to Hugo. Once, Hugo received 25 lashes for picking up potato peelings. In his work for I.G. Farben, Hugo assembled prefabricated barracks. The S.S. would beat the workers. Most people were worked to death. Birkenau, a concentration camp in Poland, was the worst experience. Hugo remembers his younger brother.

01:41:00

In Birkenau, people were beaten to death for wanting extra food. While in Birkenau, Hugo worked at the crematoria. Some people were killed by Polish prisoners. The Jewish Kapos were equally bad. Once, Hugo had diarrhea and a friend toasted him some bread which helped him. Hugo never met a decent guard in a camp. Hugo saw the operation of the crematoria up close. Hugo describes the gassing, where sometimes even 1,000 people were jammed together.

01:46:00

The people that were gassed were, at times, still alive when they were thrown into the ovens. One of Hugo's older brothers had gotten into Hungary with false papers. This older brother

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remained in Hungary until 1945. About one month before liberation, he was shot. Unlike President Tiso, Horthy of Hungary saved Jews until the Nazis actually took over the country in 1944. Hugo's older brother who hid in Hungary couldn't get papers from the American embassy. While all of this was going on, Jewish agencies requested that the Red Cross send volunteers, but they didn't. Hugo expresses that, "Nobody gave a damn."

01:51:00

The press did not even release anything. While Hugo was working in the crematoria, he heard some talk about sabotage. However, the risk to everyone was too great. Hugo feels that at least he is alive to talk about it. He remembers that no attempt at resistance within the camp was successful; everyone was caught. Hugo doesn't know what kept him going. Sometimes he admired those who had the courage to commit suicide on the electrified wires. In Lublin, there were Lithuanian guards who sadistically shot prisoners. In South River, New Jersey, Hugo heard John Loftis speak about Nazis who escaped into the United States.

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Loftis spoke about collaborators. Hugo shares his concern that so many Nazi criminals were covered up by the Central Intelligence

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Agency (CIA) because they were anti-Communist. What enabled Hugo to survive was that he didn't mind hard labor. Somehow, there was always somebody who'd help him. Hugo's work permitted him to get scraps of food to bring to others, who, in turn, helped him.

02:01:00

Hugo recalls that they never thought the war would end without their being destroyed. Near the end of the war, Hugo went to Waldlager, a concentration camp in Germany where he worked in a carpenter shop. One day in April 1945, as the Allies were nearby, plans were made to take the prisoners to the Austrian Alps to kill them. They were waiting in Poing, Germany, a railway station, when they were liberated. Fifteen or 20 hours before their liberation, they were being beaten. Hugo recalls that, "My life wasn't worth 10 cents an hour before liberation."

02:06:00

Liberators let them do whatever they wanted to, as long as they didn't kill anyone. Hugo remembers that they were warned not to over-eat. They destroyed German property. Hugo recalls that, "We were like animals." They took over the mayor's headquarters. They used the kitchen and facilities. Later, the mayor complained that they had destroyed his property. This made Hugo angry. Hugo

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was in Feldafing, a displaced persons camp in Germany, which used to be an S.S. barracks. Hugo tried to get back to Czechoslovakia. He returned home to find that his brother who was in Hungary was dead.

02:11:00

Hugo made an application for reparations, but Germany rejected his claim because he hadn't resided in Germany. Hugo has many illnesses, but he has never been compensated. Hugo spent a great deal of money in his efforts to be compensated. He tried to see Senator Bradley, but nothing was done.

02:16:00

Most of the people whom Hugo knew collected some money. Hugo finally hired a lawyer in Washington, D.C. named Perlis, who called the White House and was rebuffed. The American embassy, which refused Hugo's family, was hiding Cardinal Mindzenty. Hugo feels a stronger sense of Judaism. Most people he knew, including himself, had lost faith in God. But, after the war, his feeling about being Jewish returned. Hugo feels that the Holocaust and President Truman are responsible for the existence of the state of Israel.

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Hugo would tell young people to stand up to bigots who deny the Holocaust, such as Farrakhan, La Rouché, etc. Hugo urges that we must remember the six million. We must learn from the past neglect to us. Hugo doesn't want people to misconstrue that he is either anti-American or anti-religion, but he wants people to feel his pain.