

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Archives

Oral History Interviews of the University of California, Los Angeles Holocaust Documentation Archives

**Interview with Edgar Aftergood
March 5, 1983
RG-50.005*0001**

PREFACE

On March 5, 1983, Edgar Aftergood was interviewed on videotape by Arnold Bland on behalf of the University of California, Los Angeles, Holocaust Documentation Archives. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Department of Oral History created time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that the time-coded notes attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet has not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The time-coded notes should not be used in place of the interview itself.

Rights to the interview are held by the University of California, Los Angeles. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum received copies of the interviews as a gift from the University of California, Los Angeles. Details concerning the Museum's rights to use and reproduce the interview are contained in the Deed of Gift.

**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Edgar Aftergood
March 5, 1983**

01:00

My name is Edgar Aftergood.

02:00

Born in Berlin, Germany in 1923, and lived there until 1934. He remembers the day Hitler came to power. His parents were very modest. He studies music as a young boy. He remembers being bullied as a kid in school, because he was a Jew.

03:00

In 1934 his parents decided to go back to Warsaw because his father couldn't make a living in Berlin. It was him, his mother and his father and his sister Stephanie. No- one was happy about the move. His mother had three sisters in Warsaw so they went to Warsaw. The sisters helped then resettle.

04:00

At 11, Edgar has to learn Polish, which wasn't an easy task. He did enjoy his personal situation in Warsaw. He made friends, and he went to summer camp.

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

2

05:00

In 1939, he lived through the bombardment of Warsaw. There was a great amount of destruction. His building wasn't hit, but there were pieces of shrapnel stuck in the walls of his families apartment. The Germans overtook Warsaw.

06:00

Soon after the Germans overtook, many new anti-Jewish laws were instituted very quickly, such as wearing BRACELETS etc.

07:00

One day a soldier stopped he an his dad in the street, and said to them, "You are supposed to take off your hat when you see an German soldier," he then proceeded to hit his dad and slap him. This was the first overt act committed against him.

08:00

At this time, he doesn't remember the exact date, the walls were beginning to be built around the ghetto. All the Jews were told to move inside the ghetto walls. His mother's sister, Dr. Anna Blavdaheller, (ph) was the chief physician of the Jewish Hospital for Children in Warsaw. The hospital was called; Spital Bal Manuf be Sarnut (ph), and was on Chena (ph) Street in Warsaw.

09:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

3

This sister got an apartment in this hospital, which was moved to this school, which was on the corner of Leshow and Jelashowand streets. They all moved into this apartment with the sister.

10:00

The hospital had many very sick people. There weren't enough beds for all the kids. Some kids had to sleep on the floors in the halls.

11:00

Dr. Janus Korchuck, a man with an orphanage, would show up at this hospital with his kids, looking for a place for his sick kids. He would get very angry that there wasn't enough room and he would want special privileges for his kids. But, it was decided that they couldn't single out one group and treat them differently than the others because that wasn't fair. Dr. Korchuck ended up going with his kids to Treblinka. His story is a famous one.

12:00

, Dr. Anna Heller, his Aunt, was a widow, and a very forceful woman. She was extremely outspoken. She had many arguments with the German authorities because there weren't enough supplies for the kids. Fear did not rule her life.

13:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

4

Conditions in the hospital were so bad that Edgar remembers how everyday trucks would come to the hospital and take away 100- 150 bodies of the kids who had died. They would take these dead bodies and literally pass them out the window.

14:00

In July, 1942 big signs started to appear all over the ghetto saying that all had to report to specific places to be sent to work camps, where the conditions would be better.

15:00

The deportations were to begin. At first, they didn't know what was going on, but after a few weeks, people were starting to come back with stories about what was going actually going on. He heard about what was going on in Treblinka, because that is where the people from his town were being taken.

16:00

Life in Narsaw: It was easier for the rich than for the poor, because they sold their belongings to get food and privileges etc. They sold their things to both the because he was one of the few who were available to play.

17:00

His situation was better than most because he lived in the Hospital with his Aunt. His music studies

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

5

also helped his spirits. People did manage to gather secretly for the sole reason of study, but not all people were able to do this because of fear, and also because some were too weak and hungry to get the energy.

18:00

He went to a private apartment to study. After the war he got his High School degree, he still has this document and it means a great deal to him.

19:00

In his study group, there were two sets of students, 10 in each group. Some of the teachers from this were spoonya (ph). The school had only outstanding students, because one had to be very dedicated because life was so hard, and it was very hard to motivate. The grandson of Dr. Ludwig Zamonhov, the founder of Esperanto, was in this study group with him, and he is the only other survivor from this group. 20:00

He was in contact with him after the war but has not been in contact with him since he got to the U.S. He is in Poland still, and he has the same name as grandfather, but he changed his name. There were promoters of cultural activities in Warsaw before the deportations.

21:00

Concerts were organized on Saturday afternoon's at noon. You had to pay a fee. There was the Warsaw Opera, and the Philharmonic in the ghetto. There were concerts by: Holtzman, who was a

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

6

1st violin; Levenson, a violinist; Woiticht, a conductor, his name is mentioned in Yad Vashem.

22:00

A man named Pullman, organized the Orchestra. He was from Vienna and he got caught in Warsaw when he was there visiting his sister and his husband, who was Bialik (ph). They lived in the same building as Edgar on the first (Edgar lived on the second, the building had 5 floors) The building was Spitalina Pieant (ph) on hospital street 5.

23:00

When the Ghetto closed he moved to this building in which this grandson friend lived.

24:00

Mrs. Bialhki, tried to help the musicians, giving them food, so they would have the strength to perform. There were maybe 20 concerts that took place. On a few occasions he played as a soloist in these concerts. He played the Beethoven violin Concerto in one instance. He wasn't asked to play because he was a gifted player, but and out. Edgar would meet his father at a certain time. He moved in with his Aunt and her two daughters in Prague.

25:00

His reviews were mixed. He played Bach's E Major and Beethoven's Romans in F major at other concerts in which he played.

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

7

26:00

Some of the people who played with him at these concerts were: David Ziedel (ph), a young woman, Koshie Brokan (ph), Richard Spira, who played the piano, and Kashima Kilanter, who also played the piano. All of these people were close to him, and none of them survived.

27:00

Some high SS Officials attended some of the concerts that were given. After they started these concerts, a new law was established that they could only play music by Jewish composers.

28:00

They could still play Mendelson, and Censance (ph), who he didn't know was Jewish before this point, plus some other Jewish composers. All of these concerts ended with the deportations.

29:00

At one point, he and his mom, and his Aunt went through a selection at the Jewish Community Building. Since he was with the Hospital, they received cards that allowed them to remain in Warsaw. However, he dad did not have a card, but t he disappeared and hid out. Through a miracle, he got through this dragnet that was set up and returned to Warsaw. Stephanie, his sister, went to some nursing School at the General Hospital in Warsaw.

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

8

30:00

Stephanie got sick, and died within a few days, close to Polio. After the selection there was 50 - 60,000 Jews left in the Ghetto. They moved two hospitals into one building he still lived in a room in the hospital.

31:00

January 43 special troops were sent to Seveidl (ph) 1000 people. Rumors of self-defense appeared.

32:00

His dad went out of the Ghetto to see what the possibilities of hiding were. In January, he got in touch with his sister, who wasn't living inside the ghetto, one of the few cases.

33:00

Until the last minute, there were telephones in the ghetto which went out of the ghetto. he thought that this was sort of strange. The telephones were a means of communication for his dad to talk with the sister. The dad would go out of the ghetto every morning, with the workers, camouflaging himself as one of them.

34:00

he was able to do this because he paid off the leader of the group that led the workers, so he could

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

9

just slip in Poles and the Germans. People somehow even managed to sell Real Estate.

35:00

He stayed there four or five months. He left after he thought they were discovered. A friend of his fathers, a Pole from his University days, gave him keys to an empty apartment on the other side of Warsaw. They were to go there and hide. His fathers sister and daughters were taken away two days after they left by the Gestapo.

36:00

They stayed in this apartment for about two weeks. Then they moved to Joleebush (ph), which had a reputation of being a bit easier for the Jews. This place was built in the 1930's, as part of a labor movement, so the people tended to be a bit more liberal in their beliefs.

37:00

This village consisted of low income housing, with again liberal opinionated people compared to the others towards the Jews. There were many people hiding here. A Polish man bought the apartment with his fathers money, but put it in his (the Polish man) name.

38:00

They stayed there for about eight months. It was his father, his mom's sister, and him. One day his father had a stroke. He lost his speech and certain movement in his body.

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

10

39:00

It was hard to get help for his father because they had to be so cautious so that they wouldn't get caught. One day, a doctor showed up and helped his father. His father eventually got his speech back and was able to limp around.

40:00

His father was the only outside link to the real world. He looked Polish, so he was able to go out and go to the store, and buy newspapers etc. The neighborhood which they lived in at this point was called Bialony - it still exists today.

41:00

They were getting money from US organizations which was trickling down to some people in Warsaw. The organizations were: The American Joint Distribution Committee, and the Jewish Bund. Somehow these organizations managed to get them money.

42:00

Mrs. Bonnie Swava Warma Varman (ph) was the woman who distributed the money. She visited him recently in the states. She would leave them paper money, so that they could buy the necessary things at the store. His father would exchange this money on the black market.

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

11

43:00

One day, a big bombardment came out of nowhere. Polish partisans were taking Warsaw before the Russians liberated them. They did this because they weren't only anti-German, but they were also anti-Russian.

44:00

The Germans fought back, and won the battle. Many Jews and Poles died during this bombardment, some of whom were his friends. Milakofsky (ph) died in this battle.

45:00

The German set fire to houses with the exception of German houses. This is how Warsaw was destroyed. Because of all the destruction, he had to leave this place he was hiding in. But it was easy to get lost because all of the crowds, and the fact that there were also Polish refugees.

46:00

Bialony was an outskirts of Warsaw. It was hard on them because their father could hardly walk, but they managed to walk 20 kilometers to Bioney (ph). It took them many weeks, they rested in the woods along the way.

47:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

12

His father went to go see a Major German official when they got there, explaining that there were refugees from Warsaw, and they needed shelter. The Mayor gave him a paper with an order for a peasant in a small peasant village. The people in the village had to take them in and feed them. The village, Gola, (ph) was 5 kilometers from where they were.

48:00

They got there and the peasants said they could stay in the barn. Mr. Aftergood assured them that they wouldn't be responsible for feeding them, because he had the money to pay for their food. After one month, the German Military occupied this small village.

49:00

When the people didn't cooperate with the German's, they set their huts on fire. The Germans, were there for five weeks, and never bothered them. Adjacent to their hut there was a paramedic who moved in.

50:00

The father became friendly with him. The paramedic started receiving patients. They helped each other.

51:00

This situation went on for many months. In January 1945, there was a cold, cold winter. The

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

13

Russian army started advancing. The Germans took what they could from the peasants.

52:00

The Russians came in with tanks. They made a good impression. His father talked with the russians. The immediate danger was over, but there were still some underground Polish troops that were killing Jews.

53:00

There were some Poles, however. that helped. He was helped by some Poles who put a tremendous risk to themselves by helping them.

54:00

He made it to Lublin. His father was very ill. He went straight to the hospital with his dad. His Aunt got a job. He went from Lublin to Warsaw, to Lodz; he was traveling trying to figure out what he was going to do next. He played in the Polish philharmonic in Lodz, and he went to the Conservatory for a year.

55:00

His father got sick ,and died in Lublin. However, he died knowing he made it.

56:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.005*0001

14

His father had a strong will.

57:00

He died about the time when president Roosevelt died. Edgar stayed in Poland one year after that. He then went to Paris. He had a cousin there, Wanda Aftergood, who is in Israel now with her father and his brothers.

58:00

Wanda sent someone to get Edgar out of Poland illegally. It was all very hectic. It took 12 days to cut through all the stuff he needed to get through. He spent two years in Paris. Times weren't great, but there was freedom. He met his wife during this time. She was studying at the Sorbonne.

59:00

He eventually got papers to come to the states. Its a great country. he will be 60 one from the day the interview was taken.