

**POTOK, Edmund**  
**RG -50.030.0538**  
**1 CD-ROM**  
**In Polish**  
**March 3, 2009**

### **Abstract**

Edmund Potok was born on March 6, 1929 in Katowice, Poland. His father, Marek, was an engineer educated in Switzerland. His mother, whose original name was Gutman, was president of WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization) in Katowice. Edmund describes his family as traditional, with very close ties to their well-off parents. His maternal grandparents opened a children's home in their name. Today it is a children's hospital. Edmund was ten years old when World War II broke out. He had polio, but recovered fully. He and his parents, plus 42 family members, left for Otwock in September 1939. Russians confiscated the family's truck and diverted them to L'viv. In June 1940, the NKVD (Soviet secret police) sent them from L'viv to Krasnoye, in the Urals. In L'viv, his father got a job as an engineer, and Edmund studied in a Russian-language school. After war with Germany began, famine followed, and they were evacuated to Djabad Abad, where the father worked again as an engineer, and Edmund graduated from school at age 17. They stayed until April 1946, when they were allowed to return to Katowice. Their apartment was occupied, but they got it back with all furnishings intact. About 50 to 60 family members survived -- the ones who went to Russia instead of to camps. Edmund's family did not talk much about leaving Poland in 1946. Edmund was studying in university in Krakow and became an engineer, his father was working, and his mother was very sick with breast cancer. He advanced quickly at work. He married a non-Jewish woman and moved to Huta, Poland. He saw signs of anti-Semitism beginning in 1968, was fired from his job in 1969, and could not find work although jobs were available. Twice he was refused permission to request a visa for Israel. He sought permission to go to Sweden, and was eventually allowed to do so. Edmund had to give up his property in Poland, but he and his family retained their Polish citizenship. Edmund found work in Sweden. He received a retirement pension from Poland.

### **Interview**

Edmund Potok was born on March 6, 1929 in Katowice, Poland. His father, Marek, born December 12, 1895, was an engineer. Edmund and his parents survived World War II in Russia. His mother, whose original name was Gutman, was born June 1, 1895.

Their address was 21 Wipure, Katowice. Edmund's parents were from well-off families -- three large families from Bedzin: Gutman, Potok, and Sercarz. The family owned an oil and margarine factory. The Potoks were one of the wealthiest Jewish families in Bedzin. Jacob Gutman, Edmund's grandfather, was in the iron business, a factory. Potok, in Bedzin and other places.

Edmund speaks about cousins and family connections.

The interviewer asked why the family moved to Katowice. Edmund answered that his father, who had studied in Switzerland, probably moved to Katowice for work.

His mother was president of WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization) in Katowice. Every Friday, she went by private car to Bedzin to dine with her family. Their family had very close ties.

In 1938, Edmund was the youngest person at his grandfather's Seder, so Edmund asked the four questions, or *Ma Nishtana*. Edmund describes the family as traditional.

His maternal grandparents opened a children's home in their name. Today it is a children's hospital.

His grandmother died in 1936, and a great funeral was held. His grandfather funded a house at the cemetery.

Edmund went to a private school in Katowice. He talks about his memories of school and of the Polish children. He went to school on Saturdays.

The family spoke Polish at home. Edmund's father also spoke Yiddish. His father did not serve in army.

In 1914, Edmund's father graduated from a Russian-language high school in Lodz. His parents sent him to France, and then to Switzerland, where he lived for five years and received an engineering degree in 1921. He had to re-take exams, and learn French and English. In 1927, Edmund's father had a big wedding in Bielsko-Biala.

Edmund was ten years old when World War II began. He had been in Ustroń with a nurse, but they came back to Katowice. He had polio, but recovered after some weeks. After eight weeks, he started walking again. The disease left no permanent damage.

In 1939, his parents came to pick him up in Rapka (?) and went to Warsaw. The whole family got together, and lived at an aunt's home.

On September 6<sup>th</sup>, Edmund was awakened and told that the entire family was going to Otwock. They left in a private car, and 42 family members went by truck to the east. Edmund describes the 42 family members.

Edwarda Landau, his mother's sister, had a young son. The family stopped at her place to pick her up, but she refused to go because her child was sleeping. The next day she wanted to join the family, but could not because a bridge had been destroyed.

An explosive device fell on her house. After three days, she and her child were found alive in the rubble. They went to the Warsaw ghetto.

Edmund describes their destinies. His aunt went to a camp. His uncle died when he was hit by a streetcar. His aunt survived the camps, and was reunited with her sister, Edmund's mother, after the war.

He returns to their trip to the east, where he was enrolled in a school with many others. Russian soldiers confiscated the family's truck and sent them to L'viv. They lived in L'viv, where the family dispersed.

On June 28, 1940, the NKVD (Soviet secret police) came and asked who they were. They were registered, and taken to Russia. At the L'viv railroad station, which had many trains, the family took whatever train they could. The train trip to Krasnoye, in the Urals, took from June 29<sup>th</sup> until July 13<sup>th</sup>.

Upon arrival, people were segregated by profession. Edmund's father showed his diploma and was taken to a small house. He was given a job as an engineer.

Edmund was 11 years old then, and went to school in Krasnoye where he learned Russian. In July 1941, Russia's war with Germany began. He says all of the prisoners were freed. A famine began, although there had been food before the war.

Thousands of people were evacuated to Tashkent and to Djabad Abad. They had food. Edmund's father worked as an engineer, and the family had a small vegetable garden. The family stayed there until end of war, and one year afterward. In April 1946, they were able to go back home. Edmund graduated from the Russian-language high school, and started working. At 17 years old, he started oharng (Polish armed forces?).

In 1946, the family returned to Katowice. Their apartment was occupied, still containing all their possessions including furniture, but they got it back.

The whole family lived at Aunt Landau's house. All 42 family members came back. Edmund enumerates the family members. About 50-60 of his extended family survived, only those who went to Russia. All others perished.

In Katowice in 1946, Edmund took exams and was accepted at the university in Krakow. He became an engineer. His father continued to work as an engineer.

When Edmund was asked whether there was talk about leaving Poland, he replied yes.

He speaks about family members – some in the ghetto, some in a gulag. A cousin survived and was reunited with her father who had come back from Russia. They emigrated to Australia.

Edmund's family did not talk much about leaving Poland in 1946. Edmund was studying, his father was working, and his mother was very sick with breast cancer. She died five years later.

Edmund started working after he graduated from the university, and advanced quickly. In 1950, he thought about leaving through Vienna. He was dating the daughter of friends, but did not get permission.

Edmund met and married a woman who was not Jewish, and they moved to Huta, Poland. He was helped by a cousin from Belgium.

His father eventually moved to Copenhagen, where he lived out his life.

Edmund and his wife had two sons; one was born in 1953, the other in 1956. One son died.

Noting that his wife was not Jewish, Edmund says that the family had no religious life. In 1968, Edmund says, it is a complicated story, but his situation changed. One colleague told him about changing winds. There were signs of being ignored, being bypassed. His son called to say that he had not been accepted at the university to continue his studies. There were signs of anti-Semitism. A wall came up. Edmund's wife managed to convince the university to accept their son.

In 1969, Edmund was told that he might be let go from his job, and a while later he was fired. He started looking for another job. Jobs were available, but he was not hired.

At the end of 1969, he put in a request for a visa for Israel. This was his first rejection – too many secrets.

He heard about the possibility of going to Sweden. He went to the Swedish embassy. Edmund's father had been reluctant to go there. Eventually, his father got a permit to leave and go to Denmark.

Edmund got a second rejection. He was told he could not go to Israel because his wife was not Jewish. He said he wanted to go to Sweden and not Israel.

Finally, permission was given for him to go to Sweden. He had to give up his property in Poland, but he and his family retained their Polish citizenship. Edmund found work in Sweden. He even received a retirement pension from Poland.