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Summary

Henry (Chaim) Jelen, b. Dec 1945, Biysk, Siberia; parents Polish Jews; mother had fled to Siberia Hanukah 1939, her family later killed - mother, two brothers, two sisters (brother had joined Russian Army); once in Siberia, multiple families lived in one room; Henry's parents meet in Siberia "Even in hell, people want to have families"; Henry's father b. 1890 had been sent to Siberia with parents (father's two sisters had gone to Argentina before war, other family fled to Israel & France); experiencing antisemitism, grandfather (sexton) has his beard forced cut; post-war, Henry/parents/grandfather shelter in DP camps, e.g. Babenhausen, Germany (1946-48) where father serves as UN interpreter for a relief organization; survivors' challenges in train travel to DP camps, Henry's mother's recount of survivor whose baby dies on train & her unwillingness to release the deceased child; family encouraged out of DP camp & go to France; challenges of father "not a religious man" vs. his grandfather (mother's father) "wanting a religious home," however family keeps a kosher home; discussion re: Henry's own children; his parents who spoke only Yiddish & French immigrate to States Oct 1985; sister (b.1948) Paris having endured French antisemitic teachers; 1954 family receives papers to Israel but father "having almost died in Siberia" rejects starting over in Israel, opts for 1955 immigration to Calif; first impression of States, Henry being Buck Jones fan, "Cowboys!"; father's job as metal worker; parents' sacrifices in nurturing their children's education (Henry/masters structural engineering & minor in art - sister earns master's in education); discussion growing up "second generation Holocaust survivor"; Henry receives Jewish education, sister not; parents' PTSD from the Holocaust, their pain passed on to their children, e.g. parents difficulty forming friendships, feeling of having no country but they do join support groups; Henry's first marriage (to child of survivor) ends in divorce—her father's nightmares (had two children killed by Nazis), Henry's marriage to Toby, also child of survivor (at time of interview, Henry & Toby married 30 yrs); Henry's child survivor group (in JCC) created IHMEC Book of Remembrance, in part to obtain parents' stories, e.g. "They screamed at night...We felt they were held together by band aids," IHMEC Book eventually receives 3000 names; wife's parents' stories similar to Henry's family, had fled Poland, crossed river into Russia; more child survivor experiences, "A lot of us were named for murdered family members, have feelings of anger, eating issues, many entered helping professions."; as President of IHMEC "Children of Holocaust Survivors" (CHS), Henry's work in center e.g. starting 3rd generation CHS group; discussion on collaboration with early leadership of Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois (HMFI), e.g. Erna Gans, Al & Judy Lachman, David & Myrtle Figman, Barbara Steiner, Mr. & Mrs. Dermon; Henry assists with engineering drawings for some HMFI exhibits; discussion on Foundation's fundraising dinners/other activities; Henry reports high rate of PTSD in CHS, his concern of passing on his stresses to his children; Henry shares photographs of family & HMFI leadership.