

Today is Thursday, February 25, 1993. I'm Barbara Orris from the Holocaust Survivor & Friends Education Center in Latham, New York. I'm in the studio of Capital Cablevision in Albany to interview Mr. Sender Lipfeld of Albany, New York. Assisting with the interview today are director, Henry Skoburn, producer, Mary Alice Molgard from the College of Saint Rose, and production assistant, Chris Hans.

Good evening, Mr. Lipfeld.

Good evening.

Thank you for joining us.

Thank you.

I'd like to begin by asking you to state for the record, your full name, your date of birth, and your place of birth.

OK. I was born in July 1915, on Poland, the city of Kielce. And--

And your full name?

My full name is Sender Lipfeld.

OK, you were born in Poland before World War II. Can you tell us--

And--

And World War I.

Before the first world war too.

Can you give us a sense of what your life was like, what your family life was like in those years? Describe perhaps your education.

First of all, my father passed away with the flu at that time, when I was a year and a half old. I didn't know my father. So I know the surroundings made me feel, sometimes I didn't feel comfortable. Because I was surrounded with all cousins. They had their parents, and they had their grandparents. And I didn't have no grandparents. And I didn't have no father.

So being a religious kid, growing up in a religious atmosphere, I just figured, I said, oh God, you'll be my father. And that just makes me feel better. And then when I went on further, I started with the parochial school. I went to religious parochial school because I was brought up strict orthodox. And from there, from the parochial school, I went on private school for one year. And after that, I came to the public school.

When I came to the public school, I had experience, anti-Semitic experience at the school. First, when I was younger, before that, when I was four years old, I remember a Gentile kid threw a stone at my brother, and I was sitting in front of the steps. And instead of him, he hit me. And I still have a mark on my forehead.

While being in the school, in the public school, in that school there was 60 kids in this class. It was about six kids, Jewish kids. And I didn't know to me. To look at a Polack, a Pole is the one who's Catholic, or Catholic is a Pole. And a Jew is the one from the Hebrew mother's belief. And there's a Jew. So the teacher calls him to the blackboard, and he said to him, one of the Jewish kids, and said to him you, you Pole.

And I didn't make anything up. And I just said, no, he's Jewish. So the teacher called me next to him. He slapped me in the face, throws me out in the hole. And I go in the hole. The music teacher, Bohinski, I remember the name, asked me why do you cry. I tell him the story. He slapped me again. And I cry again. That was the experience the anti-Semitic

experience. And then of course the school also milk in the school. The kids, all the Catholic kids got milk, provided milk. The Jewish kids could not get any. The six kids, they did not get any milk.

Something like somebody went to the store and brought something. So the teacher said, he said missing one page in the tablet. The teacher tell him, don't buy that a Jew. So this was explained. And then of course the atmosphere in Kielce was one of the anti-Semitic cities. There was a pogrom in 1918, and also the pogrom in 1944, in July 1944 after the war. The city of Kielce, it was a month before the pogrom, I was a month in Kielce before the pogrom. They killed 42 Jews.

But when 1939 started, I was the first one to walk out from my city, because the Germans came in. I was a month with the Germans in the city, more than a month. And then it comes in Radom, it's a city about 120 miles from Kielce.

At that time, I want to go back. I want to smuggle to Russian. The border was closed already. I have to make a trip. So being in the city of Radom, I met a Polish kid. And I talked to him. And I was sure that I'm making friends with him. And there was people go on the train, I tried to enjoy the train to go into the city of BrzeÅ, BrzeÅ nad Bugiem. That was already the side from the Russians, the Soviet Russians.

So then when I turn back my friend, I see that he points up to the German soldiers that he's Jewish. So they took me away from the line. And they force me without gloves to work with hot coal, burned coal. So I worked there right away for a few hours. Then came another officer who said, [NON-ENGLISH] in German, [GERMAN] not to provoke him, provocation in the future.

But they start to let me go. They took groups and I ran away, and they put me to the wall, and they beat me up with the whips, two of them that I was all blood, all the way from the top to the bottom. And I had in the city Radom, there was my mother's first cousin. I went there, they bandage, put bandage on me, and I slept over there. And from then, I went farther, to smuggle to the Russian border.

I'd like to pause for a moment before we continue talking about these war years. I just want to go back to your growing up. Were the Jews living in a separate part of your town? Was that anti-Semitic? Or were you living among your Christian neighbors?

Well, what happened we was living-- actually, I was living with Christian neighbors, on the same house with Christian neighbors. There wasn't so really like the Jewish kid could not walk in the morning. Mainly we used to go through the woods. The Jewish kid was afraid because they throw stones at him. But some cases, we got along. In some cases, we didn't get along.

Also I lost-- I have to remind that I lost two brothers in gas chamber. One was taken from Paris as a Polish Jew, was taken to Auschwitz where he vanished. And the other was taken from the Kielce ghetto with his wife and little girl, one-year-old. And they was taken to Treblinka. And they was vanished in Treblinka.

After the war, I find one from our city. He was much younger than my brother, but he said he was at the same time in Auschwitz with my brother. He survived, but my brother didn't. And he said I saw that he was talking about his wife, that he left his wife and two kids in Paris. And the other brother, I went to take him, when I became I was Kielce in 1939, I said to come with me to run to Soviet Russia.

So he was engaged. He said, first of all, he's going to miss his bride. And he promised me he's going to come later. But he didn't come. Another first cousin talk him out of it, because he met the Russian army, and said it's nothing [INAUDIBLE] is coming there.

On the same time before I left Kielce, I went to my cousin. I preceded him not-- I was the president in the tailor's-- in the [NON-ENGLISH], in the tailors men's ladies, dresses, hats, and furriers. I was 24 years old, and I was the president. I was political [NON-ENGLISH]. And I told to my cousin, that's the new fascism. He will be ready for everything to get his goal. That one son of yours come with me to Russia, so that was the old psychology. What's going to be with us, going to be with him too.

And psychology was for the 2,000 years that the almighty will help. So I left by myself. And when I came, I couldn't smuggle to Russian. When I came, the border was closed. I came to the town where my father's sister used to live there. There was already in BrzeÅ nad Bugiem.

But somebody told me, another cousin, that I have my grandfather was already dead 40 years that he has a sister 16 miles farther, [PLACE NAME]. So I went there, slept over there. And I went to cross the border. So when I crossed the border, the Russian border, I met the Russian soldiers. I didn't speak at that time Russian which I do now. I speak Polish to him, and I thought they understand. I thought they make friends with me, comrades.

And I told them that I was active in the labor movement, so I thought they're going to let me in. But when I finished the story, they said you go back to the German side. They didn't let me go to the Soviet side, and the German didn't let me go back to their side. So I put a satchel, and I sit on that satchel. And over me, there's one Pole start to run away from the Russian side to the German side. So they start shooting at him. And I'm sitting so peacefully at that section, the bullet goes over my head.

Later, I told the story to my cousin, first cousin. She said, well, where do I get that courage? She said, well you was young. I was 24 years old. Finally, I went to another place, another miles, another few miles there. And a peasant did-- a peasant did smuggle me back. Also, that little Poles was of an American mark, the way I see it. It's like Poles were 75% was peasants, farmers. They couldn't read or write.

I don't blame so much on some of the Polish people directly, as the world wasn't holding-- the ruling party at that time, because it's the Nazis, and also Endekis. They did everything not to educate the peasant, not to let them educate. They was afraid somebody has to work. Somebody has to be the farming, do farming. So it's natural. It's normal. And the ignorant man when he's hungry, he'll do everything.

So when the priest teach him that the Jews killed your god, and he's an ignorant man, and I think being a live witness myself and then a fascist general speaks to them and said, get rid of the Jews, so all the peasants, he brings them together. Because they've taken over your place of making a living. So naturally, this can cause very antisemitism, and Hitler knew that, because he knew that you're going to have collaborators. And he did all those gas chambers in Poland.

And when I went to Russia, finally I smuggled through. I smuggled through. I came to Brest-Litovsk. And then I saw a refugee already. I came at that time to organize, and they send me to White Russian, a city Krychaw, and I was a tailor. I worked as a tailor a few weeks. Then they took us to city Roslavl, Smolensk, near the Smolensk state, 140 miles from Smolensk.

And there I work at the cooperative tailor shop place till 1941, when Hitler attacked Russia. When Hitler attacked the Russians, I was offered, I was thrust and offered to go to the partisan. But I didn't trust the Russian people, because there was of us, we call them blackened and smit some of them. But I thought to myself, what I'm going to do? I've been to partisan. They point out to me that I'm Jewish.

So I went to the Red Army. I had a lot of [NON-ENGLISH] on account of my health. And I said, in spite of that, take me to the army, because I want to get out of the city. But the next day, Hitler came to the city, the Nazi army occupied the city. So they took me. So then we went in [NON-ENGLISH]. And the train there is by Chelyabinsk, and near Penza.

I went to buy a few grams of bread. And I come back. The train was gone. Sure, it was gone. I ask them, where did they go? They said Ufa. And I went-- I went to try to follow them. By following them, I come 12 mile before Ufa, Dema, city of Dema. I slept. A militiaman wakes me up. He said, who are you?

Well, I said, I live here, but I'm from Poland.

Oh, from Poland. We'll see another spy. I said how could I be a spy? I'm Jewish. Never mind. We'll put you for two weeks, we find out and that's it. See so I stayed two weeks. They kept me four jails. And they kept me in the four jails. And in one month I slept on a concrete. I didn't have a privilege to have a bed. There was no place for me. The room was very small, 60 people there.

And they kept me for four months. Then finally I was accused of a spy. And in the cell, also I contract antisemitism. There was one, where he was blamed for deserter, deserting the front. And he starts with me, oh Jewish, Jewish. Since he was talking, it didn't bother me. But if you were a tailor, you would work with fish bones your work. And then he start physical. When he start physical at me, so I said, I'll show you what I can do. And I beat them up. And then the militia on the hall, he said, who started?

He opened the door. And I was surprised. I thought they're going to say it's me. Because I was the only Jewish. But no, they was with the [NON-ENGLISH]. They said, he started it. So they took him down for 24 hours. They put on a [NON-ENGLISH] to him. Then he comes back. He told us. I felt sorry for him. And then he told how they shot the people in the cellar. They make them run from one room to the other, and they shot him behind.

And then he starts again by [INAUDIBLE] another way, the old way. You're a good Jew, but the other Jews. Anyway I was shipped in four different jails. I was expecting to be shot any day, any night. And how did I survive that? Somebody asked me how did I survive.

I survived by I create a poem for myself. And every day I used to repeat that poem to myself. And that's what keeps me going. And they let us out 20 minutes, in 24 hours, 20 minutes of fresh air. Finally, that was Prime Minister Sikorski made an agreement with Stalin to let out all the Polish citizens in jail. Luckily, I was let out, and I was transferred to a military battalion.

Before you tell us a that the military battalion, do you remember the poem that you recited to yourself? Could you share that with us?

Yeah, it was in Yiddish. It wasn't Yiddish the poem. It was just a-- it was a poem, it was [YIDDISH]

How do I say, translate it in English? It was a poem full of hope, which get me courage, give me full courage, and make me sustained the whole time. And thanks to that poem I could survive. Because the food was very-- it was just water, sometimes a little fish bones, one 24 hours a piece of bread in the morning.

So when they let me out, and transferred me to the working battalion. And then I was working there at the battalion till 1943, or '44. So 1943, after that, they took me one time they took me to the market. I left my passport. I left my Russian Soviet passport at home. And they saw me in the market, the militia. And they said, they took me. They're going to send me to Polish army.

So I escaped from him. And then I came back, so he noticed me again. So he took me again. This time, I didn't escape. And he placed me with the Polish army. The Polish army was organized in [NON-ENGLISH], Ukraine, the name on the one was Slowacki, the poet, Polish poet. She was pro-communist. And this army was a second army. The first army, Anders' run out from Soviet, was anti-Semitic. They didn't take any Jews. And they crossed the border to Iran.

But this army organized themselves. And then the political officer took me for questions. And I told him that I was an organizer of labor movement. I was active in the labor movement. So I was liked to him. And he said, OK. We'll send you to the officer school. Instead to the office of school, I went-- they made a mistake and send us the under-officer's school, and a tank school, Vladimir Ivanovski. And on that tank school, then I supposed to be the best shooter. But I got really sick on my stomach, and I was placed in the hospital.

And at that time, I was lucky. Because a friend of mine, a comrade of mine from the tank, my school which was sent in the front, he got burned alive with the tank. And I was also sent. From there I was sent again in a battalion, [NON-ENGLISH] battalion, which we supplied the front. We went direct on the front. We supplied the front. And I came from there, I came from Poland. In 1944, I was already with the Polish army in Poland.

Hold on. So the war finished in 1945. I went to my city, Kielce, the pogrom. And there was a pogrom in July, and I was a month before the pogrom there. That was stationed in two places. The Jewish was stationed in two places. I remember the street, [NON-ENGLISH], and I was with a [NON-ENGLISH], then I left to the city of Lodz. That was the second

largest city in Poland. And over there was about 300,000 Jews. The one survived in Russia, 150,000, and came back. And one survived on the underground 150,000.

But then started the pogrom. They announced on the radio, the Jews started to run out from Poland. So I smuggled to Czechoslovakia. I smuggled to Germany. And I was in Germany for quite a few months. I was in the [INAUDIBLE] lager near Munich. It was a lager, a DP lager after the war. And from there I was a few months, in '47, I was a few months in Paris because I found out already that my sister was alive, and my two nephews, 16 and 11 years old, alive.

I worked there a few months. I support them. And then my brother from Canada took me over to Canada.

I'd like to go back and ask you some more questions about being in Poland during the war. Were you aware of the extermination camps when you were a Polish soldier?

When I was a soldier, I was already aware. But before that, I was not. I thought the camp some-- there was some ideas. They came to us some of these when I was on Bashkiria route, but I didn't believe it. I believe it's going to be very tough, but not so far. I said maybe it's propaganda, maybe not. But the minute when I was in the Polish army, because it was in Ukraine, and that just in a couple of months it was already in Poland. And we found out in the Red Army. We was in Poland. Poland, I saw. It was a live witness, what I found it was a live witness of what happened.

Of course there was a big drama. I felt bad. I lost the only dream was to see my brothers, my two brothers, and I know they're gone. One, I have a witness, he saw him in Auschwitz, and vanish. And the other one, my cousin told me that he was taken from the lager on Kielce to Treblinka. He had a one-year little girl, she vanished, and his wife.

And what happened to your mother?

My mother passed away on cancer in 1936. She was 64 years old. But my father passed away, I was a year and a half old. She was left with five kids, one sister, four brothers. And now I'm the only one left.

What was the reaction of your fellow Polish soldiers to the extermination camps when they were aware that they existed, and knew what was going on there? What was their reaction?

Their reaction was they didn't care themselves. They didn't feel so bad about it. And said they didn't feel so bad about it. Because a lot of us from Ukraine, Polish and Ukrainian, and they was not so friendly to the Poles. I didn't see any resentments. I didn't see any expressing any sorrow, or something from them.

But when we came between the Jews, there was very sour with this. People that were in shock. It was an awful shock. Who believed that's going to happen something like this? At that time, I had a problem with myself with my faith. I had a family, hard to stay faith. I don't want to become an atheist. I want to stay my faith. So then I figured out to stay in faith. I figured myself it's not like people expect, put the package on God, that it's God's fault.

And I said the Bible is written in the human language that we should understand the Bible. Others they couldn't understand that everybody can lift up themselves a spiritual high to reach the spirit of God. So I said it's just to me looks like just practical, a businessman leaves his business to his son. He said that's the law of the economy. You think first, you work hard, you succeed, if not, it's not.

The same thing, God gave us the ethical, the relationship between men and men. He give us the 10 commandments. That's there. And it's up to you. And that shows that you are your brother's keeper. If you let bad things, your fellow man gets killed, you do nothing about it. So don't blame on God. Blame on this. I know the whole world did nothing about it. They asked the United States to bombard the gas chambers. They refused, not strategic.

They asked Roosevelt to start earlier. So he said, he was afraid that the Jewish [INAUDIBLE]. And that's my explanation to myself with the faith, so I can ask to help me to stay, to stay, still stay believed that the law is there. Like God, it's out of his hands. It's given to the human being. And you are your brother's keeper. You have your ethical law, the relationship between men and men. The whole world was silent. Nobody actually really cared.

And it's a shame. I must say it's a shame. If I might say, it's a sensitive question. It's a shame 6 million have to vanish, 6 million Jewish people have to vanish, a million children, that the church they realized, that they did the wrong teaching. That didn't help they did the wrong teaching, that Jews killed your God. That was spreading the seed of antisemitism of the Polish people. And that's the reason.

Then the fascists, the Polish fascist leaders also, they took away-- the whole propaganda was take away the Jews to the peasants, the Jew takes away your place of making a living. Get rid of them. So after I came down, I went, my brother took me over from Paris. I came to Montreal. I was two years working in a factory. I met my wife, got married, and I came here to Albany.

Tell me more about the lager in Germany. What was that like for you?

After the war?

Yes. In the DP camp.

After the war, we did nothing. There was a DP camp. And everybody there was organizations like every organization had a section. The same camp was [INAUDIBLE]. It was a big lager. And we got food there. Some of them, they helped one goes to Israel. They tried to help him not legal immigration. But at the end, it started getting cold. And then I left after a few months being in the lager. I left for Paris.

And I smuggled to Paris, also I paid \$50. And then I was then in my sister-in-law's house. And I supported for a few months. I worked very hard, because I felt sorry for the-- I was ready to take over my brother's place. But somehow, it didn't work out. And my sister-in-law was older. She was older than me seven years.

But after being in Canada, the United States, I used to still help. We used to send them parcels of food, clothes, food. We used to help them for quite a few years. My sister-in-law passed away in a heart attack. And they already married. They already had their children. And one of them has a grandchild.

Your experiences are remarkable, having gone through so much. What are the messages that you'd like to leave for your children and your grandchildren? What, if anything, do you think we can learn from the war?

It's not the power to do-- it's not a question of revenge. It's not like when I came after the Germany, in spite what they did, I met in Stuttgart, I met a German woman. She's a poor woman with a child. The child had her eyes closed. And I start talking to her German, because I was speaking German at that time, a little. And she tell me she went to the doctor to the social medicine, like and he said the hours are closed. He didn't want to take her.

And she was start like the crying. And he said, yeah, I'll take you, if you pay me private as a private visit. She didn't have the money. In spite what happened, and I'm Jewish, and I lost two brothers and she's a German woman, and I took her and I walk over to the doctor. I pay for the fee for the kid, and I bring her home. I brought her home. And this after everything.

So that means I try with all my strength not to blame, to see that it's still a thing of hope, there's still some human beings, something. Like in the German, they said here's a story that in Latvia, there was one German who tried to help a Jew. So they took him. They burned him alive. The Germans took the German, burned him alive.

So to me, it's still a thing, it's still a little bit that thing. And you can, according to Jewish law, you cannot blame the kids for the sin of the father, so that was my reaction to them. Not in general, of course, because you couldn't accept something could happen, that you could train a man to kill human beings, one human being to other, to kill human being. How can you raise him? How can you punish a man like this?

And then when I came to Albany, I settle in Albany. And I work in a factory, and I'm already I have my tailor shop for 32 years. And now my children, I talk to my children about it. I talk to my grandchildren about it. And I have two

grandchildren, two nice grandchildren. One my grandson is 15 years old, is 16 in November, no in October. And my granddaughter is going to be in November 13 years. With God's will, she have a bat mitzvah. My grandson had a bar mitzvah.

And I was here. I worked for United Jewish Appeal for many years. And I belong to the temple now. The [NON-ENGLISH] temple for almost 40 years, I belong to [NON-ENGLISH]. I'm very glad that my son was active socially, the way I raised him. He was a board director, Jewish board of directors. He was President of the Hebrew Tailors. He was a coach in the community center. He was a coach in the little league. And he's in all the sports.

But I would like to see him get married. And I'm very proud of my daughter. I must say my son too. But my daughter, I'm very proud of her. She's a very sweet person. Everybody loves her and everybody likes her. She works out.

It's a happy ending for your family.

Yes, in some way for my family. I have a very lovely wife. I have a nice [NON-ENGLISH], that's my happy ending comments. We went through a lot. It wasn't so easy. And I came here as a refugee. Today, they have a little bit easier. There came better times when I came. Nobody helped us. We didn't get no, under socialism, not a penny. I did everything. I used to work in a factory, put in 250 sleeves a day. And then work private.

The boss couldn't understand how I do it. I just take Bufferin aspirins, and go farther. And then we move out in a better neighborhood, in [INAUDIBLE]. We still live there. And I'm glad that my son is socially active, and my daughter is loved by everybody.

Are you hopeful that the world is a safer and better place for your grandchildren?

I hope the world is a better place for grandchildren. Yeah, I hope everything we have to do to educate, to educate the future, to educate the schools, to educate and open the eyes, and we must have nothing left to us, except educate. And justice, to pursue justice as much you can. But it's not in our power we want to pursue justice. Because it's [GERMAN], [GERMAN] starting up. There is still-- I believe there are still about 10,000 Nazis in the United States. But we cannot find them.

And if we find them, they get away very easy. So only what's left to us, it's the place and humanity, that humanity is very high. The humanity. As you know, the humanity in the children are support are not a technical education. The Germans was educated technical. But give them a background, a moral, very strong moral values, ethical, moral values background. And to be somewhat realistic, to make a living that's a law. You have to make a living. But to find that it's a soul. Human being has a soul, has a desire. And to do much, you can educate the human being.

Just make him responsible, make him a gentle human being. Which there shouldn't be no discrimination. Because as they say, we all God's children. We're all in his image. And we are our brother's keeper. It doesn't matter what faith. It doesn't matter what religion, what race. We are our brother's keeper, and they should see the world. If we can establish that the future, the youngsters, should see the world, the future direction this way with this light, there is a hope. If not, God forbid.

One educator said, you can train a man to kill. The Nazis did that. And they was educated. Especially, when it comes to an economic crisis. If it's not going to be the Jew, it could be the African-American. It could be the gypsies. It could be this. They always have somebody placed as a scapegoat.

You're a wonderful inspiration having gone through what you did to have the hope that you have, it's remarkable, positive.

Yes, when I came over, I said, when I got married, I was in fact in Montreal. They gave me a nice present, the workers. And I had to make, say a few words then, and I remember what I said. I said, in spite of what Hitler, in spite of the Nazis for instance, they want us to isolate us. They wants just physical and spiritual to isolate us. We should be like cripples. In spite of that, we should go out and continue. In spite of them, continue marrying, continue for future

generations.

Is there anything that you'd like to add to your tape for your family to save for posterity?

To my family? I hope they don't have to go through this. And I hope to live in a peaceful justice world. As said, the messiah-- the messiah is, the Jewish philosopher [PERSONAL NAME] said, don't live in fantasies of messiah. Messiah will be a time where the whole world government will accept that the Jews also have a right to have their own government. There's going to be social justice in the world. And I'd like to see living the messiah like this, to reach a point like this.

Mr. Lipfeld, you're a wonderful example and teacher for your family, and for all of those who will view this tape. Thank you very much for joining us today and sharing your story.

You're welcome.