

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN, CLEVELAND SECTION

HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Name of Interviewee	SIMON FIXLER	
Name of Interviewer	Lyn Silberman	Date 9/11/84
Abstractor	Esther Potash	Date 12/28/87

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Simon Fixler was one of 16 children, born to a prosperous family in Kelca, Czechoslovakia. He recalls a happy childhood, with religious freedom and no sense of anti-Semitism. However, anti-Semitism was introduced with the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Hungarians. By 1940, the anti-Jewish atmosphere had escalated, and Jews were forced to perform menial work in labor camps.

Simon was able to evade conscription to the labor camps for a year and a half, but was finally discovered by the government and sent to a parachute factory. He married in 1943 and was able to see his wife after the work days. However, in November 1944, Simon was sent to a more severe forced labor camp, in one of Eichmann's last transports.

He endured terrible working conditions and witnessed mass murders and atrocities at the labor camp, before his transfer to the concentration camp at Mauthausen in April 1945. He and his brother supported each other physically and emotionally throughout this horrible ordeal.

In May 1945, the camp was liberated by the Americans. After a period of wandering through the countryside, Simon and his brother sought the aid of the Jewish Federation in Prague. They then moved back to Budapest, where they were reunited with the six other surviving family members.

Simon and his wife then moved to Germany, where they remained three years. Simon, who had been trained as a knitter, was selected for sponsorship to Cleveland by a local knitting mill. After coming to Cleveland, Simon held several knitting jobs and slowly began to build his life in the U.S. He became quite interested in Jewish fund raising and Holocaust memorial activities.

Simon was able to build a new life and family in Cleveland and enjoys the freedoms of the U.S. He believes it is his duty to share his experiences now. He strongly asserts that the best investment in the future of Judaism is the education and Israeli affiliation of the young people.

Simon Fixler

ABSTRACT

VIDEO 1 OF 2

INTRODUCTION

DESCRIBES CURRENT LIFE

Is married, has three grown sons. Has a furniture store in Lorain.

EARLY FAMILY LIFE

One of 16 children. Father was treasurer of bank in Kelca, Czechoslovakia. Recalls happy childhood with firm discipline.

FATHER INSISTS THAT EACH CHILD HAVE A PROFESSION

Simon became an apprentice in a sweater factory.

DESCRIPTION OF HOMETOWN

Of 40,000 population, 15,000 were Jews. Most Jews lived in Jewish neighborhoods. Town had three synagogues.

PERSONAL RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND IS MODERN ORTHODOX

LEAVES HOME AT THE AGE OF 19, WHEN HUNGARY OCCUPIES CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Moved to Budapest, finding work as a knitter.

RECALLS ANTI-SEMITIC ATMOSPHERE PRIOR TO 1939 DURING THE TIMES THAT HUNGARY OCCUPIES CZECHOSLOVAKIA; DOES NOT FEEL ANTI-SEMITISM DURING CZECH-OCCUPIED PERIODS

CULTURAL UPBRINGING INCLUDES ZIONIST ORGANIZATIONS AND MUCH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Zionist training for youth included kibbutz survival techniques. Brother did emigrate to Israel before the war.

IN 1939, ALL JEWS WHO WILL NOT DECLARE HUNGARIAN CITIZENSHIP ARE FORCED TO LEAVE

Elderly grandmother refused to leave, was taken to Galicia on cattle car before concentration camps were formed.

DISCUSSES LEISURE TRAVEL BEFORE THE WAR

Parents partook of spring waters at spa. Little leisure travel otherwise.

Simon Fixler

SIMON IS VERY HEALTHY AND ATHLETIC PRIOR TO THE WAR

FIRST MEMORIES OF THE MOBILIZATION INCLUDE FATHER URGING SONS
TO JOIN THE CZECH ARMY

Two brothers joined the army, but did not have the
opportunity to fight due to the partitioning of the country.

JEWS DO NOT ENCOUNTER MUCH ANTI-SEMITISM IN BUDAPEST IN 1939,
1940

BY 1940, ANTI-SEMITISM HAS GROWN TO THE EXTENT THAT JEWS CAN
NOT SERVE IN THE ARMY, ONLY IN LABOR CAMPS DOING MENIAL LABOR

GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO CONSCRIPT SIMON, BUT HE EVADES THE LABOR
CAMPS FOR 1-1/2 YEARS

IN 1943, SIMON IS FOUND BY THE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND FORCED
TO WORK IN A PARACHUTE FACTORY

SIMON GETS MARRIED IN 1944, PERMITTED TO LEAVE LABOR CAMP AT NIGHT
TO SEE WIFE

IN NOVEMBER 1944, SIMON IS TAKEN IN ONE OF EICHMANN'S LAST
TRANSPORTS FOR MORE SEVERE FORCED LABOR

Was taken to Kurzik via cattle car. Brother was with him
during transport and remained with him until liberation.
Performed ditch-digging in a death march that covered 35 miles
per day.

HE ENDURES TERRIBLE WORKING CONDITIONS

Health deteriorated rapidly. He and his brother supported
each other, physically as well as emotionally.

MASS MURDER AT EISHERTZ IN MARCH 1945

90 prisoners shot. Of 650 who started the march, only 280
survived. Death due to shooting and starvation.

ARRIVAL AT CONCENTRATION CAMP AT MAUTHAUSEN IN APRIL 1945

No room within camp; slept outside on the ground. Endured
Russian bombing during the nights. Prisoners dying of
starvation.

TRANSFERRED TO THE BARRACKS AT GUNSKIRCHEN UNTIL AMERICANS
LIBERATED THEM IN MAY

AT TIME OF LIBERATION, SIMON AND HIS BROTHER BEGIN WANDERING
THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE, OBTAINING FOOD FROM FARM FAMILIES

BROTHER BECOMES ILL WITH TYPHOID

AFTER BROTHER'S RECOVERY, SIMON AND HIS BROTHER GO TO PRAGUE,
WHERE THEY ARE HELPED BY THE JEWISH FEDERATION

HE MOVES BACK TO BUDAPEST, WHERE HE ENJOYS GOOD LIVING CONDITIONS,
FINDS A JOB IN A FACTORY, AND CONTACTS HIS FAMILY

DISCUSSES SURVIVAL OF FAMILY

Eight of 16 children survived: two sisters in Cleveland, one
brother in California, a brother and sister in Israel, brother in
Cleveland recently died.

WHILE IN PRAGUE, HE MEETS HIS SISTER BUT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE HER DUE
TO HER EMACIATED PHYSICAL CONDITION AND SEVERE DEPRESSION

Her job in concentration camp had been to carry and bury
dead bodies. Her depression prevented her from communicating
with others for two weeks.

IN PRAGUE, FRIEND ADVISES HIM TO LOOK FOR HIS WIFE IN BUDAPEST

VIDEO 2 OF 2

HE LOCATES WIFE, WHO HAD SURVIVED USING FALSE PAPERS, IN BUDAPEST

Wife informed him of Russian soldiers' violence after
liberation.

DISCUSSES PRE-WAR POLITICAL HISTORY OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

THEY MOVE TO GERMANY IN 1945, REMAIN THERE THREE YEARS

First came to a camp supported by United Nations Relief
Fund. Found employment in housing office for over three years.
Applied to emigrate to Caracas and Cleveland.

SIMON AND WIFE ARE SPONSORED TO EMIGRATE TO CLEVELAND BY BAMBERGER
WEINTRAUB, A CLEVELAND KNITTING MILL

Worked for the company, under poor working conditions and
low pay, in order to repay the debt of sponsorship.

SIMON TRANSFERRED TO ANOTHER KNITTING MILL, OFTEN WORKED AS MANY AS
THREE JOBS AT A TIME

Simon Fixler

HE BECOMES INTERESTED IN JEWISH ACTIVISM IN THE U.S.

Involved in fund-raising activities for the Jewish Welfare Fund. Active in Kol Israel. Led Holocaust survivor memorial activities.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE BEFORE AND AFTER THE WAR

Before the war, observed High Holidays, was not particularly observant. Brother was religious, prayed secretly in labor camp. Simon became active in Orthodox synagogue in Cleveland.

DISCUSSES DEATHS OF FAMILY MEMBERS

SIMON RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCE WITH HIS CHILDREN WHEN THEY WERE SMALL

FEELS IT IS HIS RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP ASSURE THAT THE HOLOCAUST IS NOT REPEATED

Teaching the young people to be vigilant and to be active in organizations is vital to survival of Jews.

FIRST PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF EXPERIENCE IS INTERVIEW WITH CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

SONS ENCOURAGE HIM TO ATTEND THE GATHERING IN WASHINGTON

Was particularly moved by the experience.

SIMON IS PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN

DETERMINATION AND PRESERVATION OF SELF-DIGNITY ARE HIS REASONS FOR SURVIVAL

BELIEVES IT IS HIS DUTY TO SHARE HIS EXPERIENCES NOW

BEST INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE OF JUDAISM IS TO SEND JEWISH CHILDREN TO ISRAEL TO EXPERIENCE JEWISH AFFILIATION IN ITS TRUE ENVIRONMENT