

HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Name of Interviewee	JOSEPH KLEIN	
Name of Interviewer	Judy Levendula	Date 8/1/84
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NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Joseph Klein was born in Strabyczowa, Czechoslovakia, a small town in the Carpathian Mountains that is now part of the Soviet Union.

He was part of a large, orthodox family. Joe had three brothers and three sisters. His father worked in the lumber, sand, gravel trade and the family was close and happy.

Joe's youngest sister died in childhood, and his father died of liver cancer in 1943, one year before the family was sent to Auschwitz.

The Jews of Strabyczowa were among the last to be deported. They had heard rumors of resettlement, but did not know about the concentration camps.

By late 1943 and early 1944, Jews in nearby towns were being "resettled." When the Jews of Strabyczowa were finally deported, they were gathered at the local school, then sent to the ghetto at Munkacs.

After several weeks in Munkacs, Joe and his family were sent to Auschwitz. Joe's mother and sister were sent immediately to the gas chambers. Joe and his other sister were sent to work camps.

Joe spent ten days in Buchenwald, then went to a work camp near Leipzig where he repaired a bomb-damaged petroleum refinery.

As bombing grew heavier, the work camp was evacuated by train. Joe and another prisoner managed to escape from the train during an air-raid, but they were recaptured several days later and returned to their unit. During the march back, Joe's companion was shot by their Gestapo guards.

Joe's unit was forced to march to Theresienstadt. Of 3,000 to 4,000 who began the march, only 1,250 made it to the camp.

Joe remained Theresienstadt for one month. Then, on May 8, 1945, he was liberated by the Russian army.

Shortly after liberation, Joe became gravely ill with typhus. He was not expected to recover, and doctors sent for an

undertaker. But Joe was determine to survive.

When he was well enough to travel, Joe obtained a train ticket to Czechoslovakia. He intended to return to Strabyczowa, but found his brothers, and uncle, and his sister living in Chop. He settled there, but at the end of 1945, he and his brothers and sister crossed the border into Czechoslovakia before it was permanently closed.

In May 1946, Joe went to England through an orphan-refugee program. Three years later, he immigrated to the U.S. Eventually, all of Joe's surviving siblings came to the U.S.

Joe served in the American army for 19 months during the Korean war, and then worked as a printer at the Cleveland Press.

He travelled to Israel for the country's tenth anniversary, where he met his wife, Bela.

Joe now lives in South Euclid, Ohio, and works as a property manager. He and his wife have two daughters, Audrey and Mona.

**ABSTRACT**

**VIDEO 1 OF 2**

**PRESENT LIFE**

Works at Owner's Management Co. as property manager. 55 years old, lives in South Euclid, Ohio. Has a wife, Bela, and daughters Audrey and Mona.

**BORN IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA**

Today his hometown is in Russia. Town's name is Strabyczowa, near Munkacs, in Carpathian Mountains.

**JOE'S FAMILY**

Four boys, three girls. Three of the boys and one girl are now living. Two sisters killed at Auschwitz, father died of cancer one year before family sent to Auschwitz. Mother killed at Auschwitz. Family was very close. Joe was second youngest. One older brother at University of Munkacs, another brother worked in Munkacs. Brother, Andor, helped father in lumber, sand gravel business. Lived comfortably.

**SOCIAL LIFE**

Town held dances, other get-togethers.

**JOE'S EDUCATION**

Joe was one for four Jewish students. He was top student. Not allowed to attend high school as of 1940's.

**FAMILY IS ORTHODOX**

**JOE IS A HEALTHY CHILD**

Had a case of whooping cough. Sent to several different climates to recover.

**JOE'S YOUNGEST SISTER DIES IN CHILDHOOD**

**JOE IS VERY CLOSE TO FATHER**

Did many activities together. As youngest son, Joe got extra attention.

## MORE ON BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Next oldest sibling is Helen Gottesman, living in Cleveland. She is five years older. Next is Andor, 8 years older. Brother Zoltan, now called Steve, is 12 years older, living in Calif. Late brother was 15 years older, lived in Israel.

## JEWS IN STRABYCZOWA ARE AMONG THE LAST TO BE DEPORTED

Heard rumors, saw trains. Heard Jews were going to be resettled. Didn't know about concentration camps. By late 1943, early 1944 Jews from nearby towns were being resettled.

## JEWS OF STRABYCZOWA ARE DEPORTED

Given 48 hours to pack. Gathered at local school. Next day taken away. Family members deported were Joe; mother; older sister, her husband and their baby; sister Helen; younger sister.

## TAKEN TO MUNKACS GHETTO

Ghetto was a closed brick factory. Had Hungarian police as guards.

## THEY ARE IN THE GHETTO TWO TO FOUR WEEKS

Joe worked as carpenter, closing transport train cars with cable, wire.

## THEY ARE DEPORTED

On locked freight train four to five days. Very crowded. People brought their own food. Many got sick.

## GRANDMOTHER IS ALSO IN GHETTO. DEPORTED IN EARLIER TRANSPORT

## THEY ARRIVE AT AUSCHWITZ. FAMILY IS SPLIT UP

Didn't know, at the time, where they were. Arrived on a hazy morning. Several trains arrived together. Saw people in striped clothes. They advised young women to give babies to older women. Sister did not give up baby; this led to her death. Family lined up, passed by a man in Gestapo uniform. Joe now knows he was a doctor. Older sister, brother-in-law sent to the right. Joe was asked if he could work. Replied yes, sent right. Mother, other sisters sent left. Never saw them again.

## JOE SNEAKS INSIDE WAREHOUSE, GETS SWEATER FOR SISTER AND OTHER WOMEN.

Didn't recognize sister at first, because she had no hair.

## JOE AVOIDS BEING TATTOOED

He kept changing barracks so he was never given a number.

## AFTER A FEW DAYS, JOE IS SENT TO BUCHENWALD

Stayed approximately ten day.

A NEIGHBOR IS ALSO AT BUCHENWALD. HE DIES DURING AN EPILEPTIC SEIZURE

SS made fun of him, allowed him to choke to death.

## JOE IS SENT TO A WORK CAMP NEAR LEIPZIG

Worked in a petroleum refinery, repairing bomb damage.

## HE IS ALMOST KILLED DURING AN ALLIED BOMBING RAID

## JOE AND FELLOW PRISONERS ARE EVACUATED

On train two to three days. Didn't know where they were going. Got food once or twice.

SS FORCES THEM OFF TRAIN SO THEY CAN CHARGE LOCOMOTIVES. A PRISONER KILLS HIMSELF BY THROWING HIMSELF IN FRONT OF TRAIN

A FRIEND FROM JOE'S HOMETOWN IS ON TRAIN WITH JOE.

Friend's name was Shlomo Ackermann.

## JOE JUMPS OFF THE TRAIN WHEN IT IS BOMBED BY ALLIES

He and another prisoner ran into woods. Found a hunting lodge, ate raw meat.

## THEY ARE RECAPTURED, FORCED TO MARCH

In a German village, young boy told them they'd get food if they went to a specific house. Gestapo were waiting for them there. Gestapo forced recaptured prisoners to run, shooting at them to make them run faster. Joe's friend shot in the knee, fell, then was shot in the head.

## THEY MARCH TO THERESIENSTADT

3,000 to 4,000 began march. 1,250 were alive when they arrived. Many shot on march. German civilians were angry because bodies were left where they fell.

## SHLOMO ACKERMANN SAVES JOE'S LIFE DURING MARCH

Two days before arrival at Theresienstadt, Joe felt too weak to go on. Shlomo grabbed him, forced him to continue. Later, Shlomo was at Joe's wedding in Israel.

## LIFE AT THERESIENSTADT

Joe was one of youngest inmates. Worked cleaning bathhouses. Had decent, older German guards. Guards allowed him to pick vegetable in fields. Joe brought food back to camp for friends.

IN A TOWN OUTSIDE THERESIENSTADT, LEITMERITZ, RESIDENTS THROW FOOD TO PRISONERS

THEY ARRIVE AT THERESIENSTADT ONE MONTH BEFORE LIBERATION

THEY ARE LIBERATED MAY 8, 1945

Joe heard a rumor that Theresienstadt was to be blown up by Germans before liberation, but it did not happen.

RUSSIAN LIBERATORS TELL FREED INMATES TO GO OUT AND KILL GERMANS MORE ON LIBERATION

Joe took a pair of shoes from a German. Russians gave them food.

MANY GET TYPHUS, INCLUDING JOE

His second cousin, Herschel Estraicher also got sick. Joe was assumed to be dying. Doctors called undertaker, but he recovered.

JOE IS GIVEN TICKETS TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Train very crowded. Joe rode on outdoor steps all night.

HE FINDS THREE BROTHERS, UNCLE AND BROTHER IN CHOP

They stayed there - did not return to hometown.

## VIDEO 2 OF 2

MORE ON SISTER KEEPING BABY, BEING SENT TO GAS CHAMBERS

BROTHERS ARE DRAFTED INTO HUNGARIAN ARMY

Jews placed in work camps rather than concentration camps.

SISTER, HELEN, IS ALSO IN CHOP

JOE MAKES SURE ALL BROTHERS AND SISTER CROSS TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA  
BEFORE BORDER CLOSES IN LATE 1945

Joe and another man, Abe Weiss, paid Gypsies to take them  
across after border already closed.

JOE STAYS WITH SISTER AND BROTHER-IN-LAW, ALEX GOTTESMAN, IN  
LEITMERITZ, 1945-46

JOE REGISTERS FOR ENGLISH REFUGEE PROGRAM FOR ORPHANED SURVIVORS.  
GOES TO ENGLAND IN MAY 1946

105 boys and girls, age 17 or younger, travelled to England  
via Prague, Paris. Joe became apprentice printer in London.

JOE'S BROTHER, STEVE, COMES TO U.S.

Lived in Cleveland, then in Calif.

JOE COMES TO U.S., DECEMBER 10, 1949

Traveled on Queen Mary. Stayed with elder brother in  
Cleveland.

JOE WORKS AS PRINTER AT CLEVELAND PRESS

HE SERVES IN ARMY, 1951-52

Drafted exactly one year after arrival in U.S. Was in Korea  
for 19 months. One of first Holocaust survivors to come back  
from Korea, got special welcome from Cleveland Jewish community.

BROTHER, ANDOR, AND FAMILY COME TO U.S. FROM PARIS

JOE LIVES WITH BROTHER IN CALIF. BRIEFLY

JOE VISITS ISRAEL DURING TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF STATEHOOD. MEETS  
WIFE, BELA, IN ISRAEL

Two years later, daughter, Audrey, born. Five years later,  
daughter, Mona, born. Audrey lives in Cleveland. Mona is  
student at Kent State University. Very involved in Jewish  
activities.

## JOE SHARES EXPERIENCES WITH HIS FAMILY

Mona very interested, but Audrey upset by it.

## MORE ON DAUGHTERS

JOE OFTEN ASKS HIMSELF WHY HE SURVIVED. TRIES TO LIVE UP TO RESPONSIBILITY OF SURVIVING

JOE DOES NOT HATE GERMANS, BUT FEELS THEY SHOULD HAVE STOOD UP TO HITLER

HAS NEGATIVE FEELINGS ABOUT LOSS OF MOTHER, SISTER, GRANDPARENTS  
FATHER DIES OF LIVER CANCER IN 1943

When brother freed from concentration camp, found father's grave, put up a headstone. Later, they exhumed his body, buried him next to his brother in Israel.

JOE BELONGS TO WARRENSVILLE CENTER SYNAGOGUE

JOE IS DETERMINED THAT HOLOCAUST MUST NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN

Survivors must share experiences. Lesson of the Holocaust is that we must never allow another Hitler to come to power.

JOE WISHES HE COULD TALK TO PEOPLE WHO DENY HOLOCAUST

Not in anger, just to talk to them.

JOE LEARNED A LESSON; NEVER SUBMIT TO ANYTHING UNQUESTIONINGLY  
AS LONG AS ISRAEL REMAINS STRONG, JEWS KNOW THEY'RE PROTECTED

JOE IS SHARING HIS EXPERIENCES TO TELL THE WORLD WHAT HAPPENED  
AND PREVENT IT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN