

HOLOCAUST ARCHIVE PROJECT

Name of Interviewee	PAUL KUPER		
Name of Interviewer	Allen Binstock	Date	8/14/84
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NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Paul Kuper was born on December 31, 1933 in Brussels, Belgium. He was the youngest of three children and had a sister who was four years older than he and a brother who was six years older. His mother's family were White Russians and had emigrated to Paris when she was one year old. His father's family went to Paris from Warsaw when his father was 12. Both families eventually moved to Brussels.

When Paul's mother was six, her father died. Shortly after, her mother (Paul's grandmother) remarried, and she was sent to live on a farm with non-Jews. When she was 21 she returned to Brussels and still considered herself Jewish.

When Paul was born, the Kupers lived in a small apartment with no running water. Paul remembers his childhood as a happy time. His father worked long hours as a baker, but his mother was always there.

The Germans invaded Brussels in 1940. Before the Germans arrived, many Jews fled to France. Paul's godmother, who was a good friend of his mother's, came and asked to take the children with her to France. Paul's mother said that all of them would go or none would. But Paul's mother had recently broken her leg and could not travel, so all of the Kupers stayed in Brussels.

Before they marched in, the Germans bombed Brussels. Paul remembers hiding in a basement with his mother; when the bombs stopped he looked out the door and saw two Germans standing there.

The Germans established their headquarters in a school on the Kupers' street. It was not bad at first, but in 1941 the Germans started requiring that Jews wear yellow stars; then they put up signs banning Jews from theaters, movies, and hospitals. His father was banned from working, but he managed to work anyhow.

His parents soon received a letter saying that Paul's older brother and sister had to go to a labor camp. They left on the first convoy from Brussels to Germany.

Paul's mother took him to the Tuberculosis Society, where the underground was active. He was placed in a sanatorium in a suburb, under a non-Jewish name, where he stayed in 1941 and 1942. Only

Once a month Paul could have family visits. In the second month a non-Jewish family friend, Seline Sinn, came and told him the Germans had taken his mother from their home. When his father came back from work and heard about it, he went to the Gestapo and gave himself up. His parents were sent first to Malines and then to Germany.

When Seline Sinn came back she said the Germans would be coming to the sanatorium to look for Jews. He stayed with her, in his old neighborhood, and went to Catholic school. For a while he lived with "Aunt Seline's" sister in another suburb where he attended another Catholic school, learned Latin, and became an altar boy.

In 1943, Paul was again living with Aunt Seline when the Germans came for a Jewish woman they heard was in the house. They searched the house and found Paul.

The Germans had made an agreement with the Red Cross that children taken alone would stay in Belgium; therefore, he was sent to a village near Brussels, which was controlled by teenagers - apparently Jewish youth. A few months later, in 1944, he was sent to another camp in Aix-la-Chapelle, where he lived in an old castle which was full of rats.

As the English were beginning the liberation of Belgium, underground members from nearby Peruwelz came and told the children to run to the woods so the Germans would not use them as hostages. The underground rounded up the children and took them to stay with families in Peruwelz.

Aunt Seline found Paul in Peruwelz, and they hitchhiked back to Brussels. He lived there and continued in the Catholic school. When his godparents came back from France, he went to live with them, but continued to visit and help Seline Sinn's family.

Paul's godmother had family in Cleveland, and she had been trying to emigrate for over 30 years. After the war, she submitted the names of Paul and her own son for emigration. Paul didn't really want to emigrate, but ten days before his 21st birthday he came to the United States.

Paul lived with his godmother's cousins in Cleveland and became a truck helper for Dean Supply. Later he the military, where he learned English and saw the country. However, he was sent to Germany, which was very difficult for him.

Currently, Paul lives in South Euclid, Ohio. He is married and has four daughters.

ABSTRACT

VIDEO 1 OF 2

PRESENT

Paul Kuper was 50 years old when interviewed. Lived in South Euclid and owned a service station. Married 25 years. Four daughters: Kim, age 18; Jeannette (Gigi), 16; Nicole (Nikki), 14; Kelly, 12.

LIFE IN PRE-WW II BRUSSELS

Kuper was born December 31, 1933 in Brussels, Belgium and stayed until 1954 when he came to the U.S. Lived in mixed neighborhood, many Jews and many non-Jews. Lived with mother, father, older sister and brother. Lived in apartment with one bedroom and kitchen; no running water.

FAMILY LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Mother, Fanny Belfiar, White Russian; was one year old when family came to Paris. Father, Joseph Kuper, came from Warsaw to Paris at age 12. Both moved to Brussels where a good friend, who became Paul's godmother, introduced them. Family was very happy years. Sister, Sara, was six years older; brother, David, was four years older. Mother was a very strong person. She was six when her father died. Soon her mother remarried and she was sent to a farm to live with non-Jews until she was 21. Still, she had a strong Jewish feeling. Paul's family was not very religious.

EARLY SCHOOLING

Remembers kindergarten and first grade. Brother was in sixth grade. Paul was too young for a Jewish education before the war.

FAMILY/RELATIVES

Father had brother in Brussels, but they saw him very little. Mother had a sister in Paris; now he has a cousin there.

ANTI-SEMITISM BEFORE THE WAR

No experiences. There was little in Belgium, Holland, Scandinavia.

THE WAR BEGINS. KUPERS CONSIDER FLEEING BUT THEY REMAIN IN BELGIUM

It took five days in 1940 for the Germans to invade Brussels. He hid with mother in a basement. Prior to the actual invasion, some Jews were fleeing to France. His godmother asked his mother to let her take the children. His mother said, "Take all of us or no one." But his mother had a broken leg then, and the godmother thought she would endanger others since she could not run. In 1941 Jews had to start wearing Star of David; then were banned from many activities. Father banned from working, but somehow went.

BROTHER AND SISTER ARE SENT TO A LABOR CAMP

Germans sent letter to his parents stating that brother and sister must go to a labor camp. They were 16 and 14 respectively. Mother prepared sacks of food and tried to comfort them, saying war would end soon. After they left, she fainted.

PAUL IS HIDDEN IN A SANATORIUM

Mother took Paul to the Society of Tuberculosis where the underground was strong. They placed him in a sanatorium in a Brussels suburb (Autogem) under a false name. Only the director knew he was Jewish. This was in 1941-42.

PAUL LEARNS THAT HIS PARENTS ARE IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP

A non-Jewish friend of family visited him once a month. Soon she told him that the Germans had taken his mother. When his father came home and found out, he went to the Gestapo and gave himself up. His parents went to a camp near Antwerp in Malines before going to Germany.

PAUL GOES TO LIVE WITH CATHOLIC FAMILY

When his mother's friend came again, the director said the Germans were coming to look for Jews and asked whether Paul could live with her. She took him and had him baptized in the church to protect him. Her name was Seline Sinn. He lived there and sent to Catholic school. He had to move again, but continued to live as a Catholic. Catholic school was like "brainwashing." Luckily he was old enough so he could decide later what religion he really was.

PAUL IS CAPTURED

He was living with Aunt Seline. Germans heard about a Jewish woman living in the house, and they found him too. This was 1943; he had been with Aunt Seline about a year.

SELINE SINN BECOMES FAMILY

Seline had lost a son when he was a baby. She had three daughters and took Paul as a son. The last news about Paul's family was a letter from his mother saying she was going to Germany. There was never any news about his brother and sister except rumors that some children escaped. Aunt Seline went to see about a girl named Sara Kuper, but it was not his sister.

MORE FEELINGS ABOUT BEING CATHOLIC

In 1943, Paul was nine years old; he didn't have a mind of his own, but did what grown-ups told him to do.

LIFE WITH AUNT SELINE

Paul had no friends in the neighborhood. Everything was rationed; there was never enough food or coal.

MORE ABOUT PAUL'S CAPTURE BY THE GERMANS

Germans took him to Gestapo headquarters where about 15 others had also been taken. An agreement with the Red Cross provided children taken alone would stay in Belgium; those with parents went to Germany.

He went to a village near Brussels supervised by teenagers. There were no German guards. After a few months he and the older children went to another camp at Aix-la-Chapelle near Bastogne. They stayed in an old castle with many rats. The Jewish Council seemed to run these camps.

LIBERATION

As British were coming and Germans retreating, underground members took children to peruwelz to stay with families. Aunt Seline found him there and took him home.

MORE ON JEWISH CHILDREN WHO BECAME CATHOLIC

Many Jews were baptized as a means of protection, but some remained Catholic and even became priests. Paul observed some were younger than he and never knew they were Jewish, but he couldn't understand about those his age and older.

PAUL LIVES WITH AUNT SELINE AFTER LIBERATION, BUT PRAYS FOR HIS FAMILY'S RETURN

When he was liberated he lived with his Aunt Seline and still went to Catholic schools. In 1945 when people started coming back from Germany, he kept going to the railroad station to look for his father. He prayed to Christ for one person in his family to come back and promised to become a priest if someone did.

GODPARENTS RETURN FROM FRANCE

The Jewish Federation tried to get Paul to a family member, but only his father's brother was living in Brussels and his family had too many children; he went to live with his godparents. They were religious, but he still went to church.

PAUL RETURNS TO JUDAISM

When Paul was 14 he said to himself his parents were killed because they were Jewish, so he decided he was a Jew. At age 15 he was part of a group Bar Mitzvah.

MOST PAINFUL MEMORIES

When he learned that the Germans had taken his mother, he kept asking God, "why me?" His strongest memory from the war is the loss of his family and the wish for everyone to have a mother and father.

AFTER THE WAR PAUL GOES TO WORK IN LEATHER INDUSTRY

Belgian law allowed work at age 14. He was in the sixth grade, but felt he should help his godparents. Became a leather worker. His boss was from Antwerp and spoke Flemish and Yiddish. Paul spoke only French, so he learned Yiddish.

PAUL EMIGRATES TO CLEVELAND

He came with godmother's son under his family's sponsorship.

VIDEO 2 OF 2

MORE ON AUNT SELINE AFTER THE WAR

While living with godparents, went to Aunt Seline's every Sunday to help and to show respect. She was a very strong woman and headed the family. Her husband was retired, and her son helped financially.

MORE ON LIFE IN BRUSSELS AFTER THE WAR

When Paul decided to remain Jewish, he started to work with the Jewish Federation. He helped get children ready to go to Israel, though he didn't want to go. Worked with several Jewish organizations. He did not have political interest. He was a worker; went dancing, to cafes, and enjoyed being out every night. Was not much involved with culture.

COUSINS SPONSOR HIM IN U.S.

He lived with cousins on Morrison Ave. off 105 St. for three months, rent free. Couldn't do leather work in Cleveland and didn't know the language well enough to go to N.Y. or L.A. He decided to do different work and got a job at Dean Supply as a truck helper. Realized he had to learn English.

PAUL ENTERS THE ARMY

The service was "the best college;" he learned English and saw the country. However he was sent to Germany in 1956; it was very uncomfortable. Doesn't blame all Germans, but feels Germany has been the aggressor in every war. He doesn't buy German products here.

PAUL KNOWS HIS PARENTS WENT TO AUSCHWITZ

No one had news of his parents.

JEWISH LIFE IN CLEVELAND

Paul belongs to Taylor Road Synagogue. Most of the congregation were in concentration camps. He stayed in the U.S. because he wanted to marry and have children and wanted them to have a better life than he. Family is important and he is close to his wife's family.

THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES OF THE HOLOCAUST

Sometimes he thinks of the Holocaust and of his family members and asks, "Why? Why me?" He thinks people have to suffer to realize how good things are. Paul can't understand how Germans, supposedly smart, could have followed "a little guy from nowhere". Paul used to dream about the war, especially that he was with his mother.

MEMORIES OF HIS FAMILY

He remembers how beautiful his sister was and how his mother took her to her first dance. He also remembers how he used to play - horse around - with his brothers. He, himself, was spoiled because he was the baby. He compares how he and his mother were both raised in Catholic families. He also notes how his mother saved his life by taking him to the sanatorium.

PAUL GIVES THIS INTERVIEW TO HELP CHILDREN KNOW

He has always wanted to tell his children about his background.

PAUL FEELS JEWS SHOULD ESTABLISH A HOLIDAY TO COMMEMORATE THE HOLOCAUST

HE FEELS THE HOLOCAUST TAUGHT JEWS THAT THEY MUST TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER