

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Oral History Volunteer Collection

Summary of Interview with
LEONARD GORDON
RG-50.106*0135

Date of interview: October 24, 2000

Interviewer: Margaret Garrett

Note: This summary follows the order in which the interviewee relates his story and thus does not necessarily present the interviewee's experiences in chronological order.

Tape 1 of 2/Side A

Leonard Gordon (né Leizer Gordon) was born on June 8, 1925 in Tilsit, Germany and grew up in Shavl, (Siauliai) Lithuania. He came from a religious and well-to-do family. He had a brother, Abraham, and a sister, Esther, who also survived the war. His parents, Judah and Miriam (née Miriam Goldberg), did not survive the war. He attended Jewish grade school and high school, where he spoke Hebrew. At home he spoke Yiddish. In 1940, the Russians occupied Lithuania and created more restrictive laws. The Russians imposed quotas on the farmers, forced the use of the Russian school system and language, and confiscated property. When Germany invaded Lithuania in 1941, Leonard and his family tried to escape to Russia, which was about 60 miles (100km) from Shavl. They could not, however, pass the Russian border. They were put into the Shavl ghetto, where they were forced to work and live under poor conditions with little food.

Tape 1 of 2/Side B

In 1944, Leonard and his family were transported to Stutthoff, Germany, a concentration camp, where the men and women were separated. He, along with his father and brother, were soon after taken to Dachau, Germany, where they worked at Muehldorf, a work camp of Dachau. Leonard and his brother were then separated from their father. He later learned that his father was beaten to death. Leonard and his brother helped each other stay alive and were useful to work as skilled carpenters. Also, they had a friend who was responsible for rationing bread, so they would sometimes receive extra rations.

After American forces liberated Leonard and his brother in May of 1945, they stayed in a displaced persons camp in Feldafing, Germany, but desperately wanted to leave Germany. They planned to move to Israel. In 1946, they went to Castel Gandolfo, Italy, to begin their emigration to Israel. Leonard attended school in Italy, studying to be a radio technician and to speak English. He and his brother subsequently decided that they did not want to go to Israel. After receiving letters from their cousin in America, they moved to Washington, D.C. Once arriving in America, he lived with friends that were from his hometown. His sister had moved to America from Germany one year before, so he also lived with her until his marriage in 1950.

Tape 2 of 2/Side A

Leonard went to universities and became an electrical engineer. He later served in the United States Army. Although he grew up in a religious family, he was not religious when he came to America. After his wife died, he lived with his religious son, who inspired him to become observant again.