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Oral history interview with Alex Konstantyn.

Gail Schwartz, on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History Branch, conducted the interview with Alex Konstantyn by telephone on October 8, 2015.

Alexander Konstantyn (born September 3, 1937 in Vaenz, Poland - near Bialystok) discusses: his childhood in the only Jewish family in the town, his father Baruch, a wheat merchant, who converted his Polish currency into gold coins, not having any problems between 1939-1941, though they saw Polish women and children refugees in the summer of 1941 and heard that Jews were being sent to labor camps, his mother, who had blue eyes as did Alex, saying that they should pretend to be Polish refugees, her packing food, water, winter clothes and the gold coins which she placed in a tool belt she made, in summer of 1942 joining a Polish group who was heading south, the three of them sleeping outside or in barns, staying 10 days with a farmer who then brought them a pie, Alex's father getting violently ill from the poison in it and dying that night in his wife's arms, Alex's mother and he then leaving immediately with their clothes and gold belt, begging for scraps of food, being taken to a police station and put in a cell with other Jews, his mother cooking in the kitchen there and finding a wire to help unlock a gate and escaping through barbed wire from the prison, mother stealing girl's clothes from a clothesline so Alex would not look like a boy, going back to their village in the beginning of 1943 to Mr. Burka who did business with Alex's father, giving him the gold and asking for shelter, living in a hole in the ground in a woodshed in the dark for almost 2 years, his mother rubbing his muscles to help him grow, her inventing stories to tell him and making him repeat them back to her, hearing Russian and German voices in the end of 1944, Russian soldiers coming into the woodshed to throw a grenade down the opening and being stopped by a Russian Jewish soldier who came back later with goggles he had smeared with dirt because they had been in the dark for so long, coming out of the hole and being frightened at first of the soldiers who then made him a mascot, his mother remarrying another survivor, Mr. Diamant, going to Lodz, attending a Jewish school there, getting beaten up by Polish children, having nightmares and bitter memories, taking a train to Italy in the summer of 1950 and then by boat to Israel, living in Herzliya, learning Hebrew, still having nightmares in high school, going into the Israeli army in 1958, seeing a large parade of tanks for Ben Gurion's visit which ended his nightmares, coming to Newark, New Jersey to his uncle, working unloading merchandise, going to Jewish Theological Seminary and Pace University, getting married in 1969, being a school principal, retiring in 2009, speaking to school children but still getting emotional when talking about the death of his father, not wanting to get reparations as it is "blood money ".