

Oral History: Leopold Zylberman, April 17, 1997

Tape 1. Leopold Zylberman, born in Warsaw, Poland on January 23, 1915, describes: being one of three children to his father, Abraham's, second wife; his family living together with his father's first wife and their three children; a happy childhood; his father's prosperous export business; attending a Zionist-run school; speaking Polish in the home; a happy middle class family life and daily life in Warsaw; observing Jewish traditions; Polish antisemitic acts against Orthodox Jews in the 1920s; Polish behavior toward Jews increasingly following the German example after 1933; growing antisemitism after the death of Pilsudski in 1935 and with the introduction of the new constitution; getting married in 1939; in the wake of the Polish mobilization, going to Krakow and then returning to Warsaw; witnessing the Nazi air assault on Warsaw and subsequent artillery attack; surrender of Warsaw following failure of French and British help; beginning of the German occupation of Warsaw followed by more normal life; SS seizure of personal valuables and merchandise from the family business; a failed attempt on November 10 [1939] to flee Warsaw followed by a successful escape across the Volga River; being seized by the Russians and jailed; making their way to Bialystok.

Tape 2. Zylberman describes: using smugglers to take him and his wife, brother, and sister-in-law over the Lithuanian border to Vilna, circa January 1940; making their way to Kovno (Kaunas); obtaining visas to travel to Japan via Russia; going by train (as a passenger) with his wife to Moscow, where they were tourists and lived well; taking the trans-Siberia railroad to Vladivostok; taking a "cattle boat" Tsuruga, Japan, and then to Kobe by train, where they were met by friends who had come on an earlier boat; going to Yamamoto-ori, where they stayed in a Jewish community; his brother and sister-in-law leaving for Burma; experiencing good treatment by the Japanese and largely enjoying daily life; a change in Japanese visa policy, which required them to be relocated to Shanghai; life in Shanghai with a large number of refugees and expats; observing Japanese military activity in the area; contracting tuberculosis; learning that his brother and sister-in-law had been evacuated from Burma to India; creation of a ghetto-like District for Alien Refugees in 1943; establishment of fairly normal life in the District; being able to keep informed of major news events, such as the fall of Stalingrad, Russian entry into Berlin, and the atomic bombings of Japan; the Japanese surrender and arrival of U.S. forces in Shanghai; working for the U.S. military; obtaining visas for Australia; traveling to Australia via Hong Kong; having a daughter in 1950; building a life in Australia.