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Summary

Pinek Krystal was born June 21, 1920 in Zgierz, Poland. His father had five siblings. His mother had three siblings. Brother Yacov born September 1923. Father owned the only bookstore in town and was president of shop owner's association in town. He went to Jewish primary school but lost interest in religion at about age 10. Not a religious home but spoke Yiddish there and throughout life. Joined a Maccabi sport club at 10. Went to a general college for 2-3 months and then to a technical school in nearby Lodz. Recalls some antisemitism, not directed at him, but groups of Poles attacking other Jews near father's shop. Mother had family in Paris and in December 1935 he went there, going to College Charlemagne for 3 months and helping out in family deli. In September 1937 he returned to Poland, finding it more antisemitic than earlier. A Pole opened a bookstore across the street from father's store and a man stood in the street to urge customers not to patronize father's store causing Krystal to fight with him. About the same time Poland moved end K kosher ritual slaughter of animals and made it hard for Jews to attend medical school. Krystal, brother and cousin organized the youth wing of the socialist Bund.

When war started the family left for Warsaw except for mother who stayed with her uncle. They were machine gunned by planes along the way and many were killed. In Warsaw, father, brother and cousin wounded in bombings. When Germans entered Warsaw, Jews were pointed out by Poles and were pulled out of bread lines. The family returned to Zgierz. Religious Jews were beaten and seen as unfit for work. Father and brother ordered to work in Strykov (?). Jews were taken to City Council yard and made to do exercises and if they could not, they were beaten. Krystal went to Lodz where a relative supplied bread to the family. There he learned another cousin was going to Russian occupied part of Poland. He went to Mykinia (?) in the Russian zone where he and others were denied entry into the town. The next day, the group sang the "Internationale" and made it into town. Then he went to Bialystok by train and then to camps nearby. In January 1940, he and others asked to work in coal mines near Kizel, Russia, where he worked as a mechanic working 120 meters underground. Meanwhile, his parents were in the Lodz ghetto and he sent them soap and food. NKVD tried to get him to become a Russian citizen, but he was anticommunist, but was forced to agree to avoid being sent to the camps. At one point he and a few others escaped to Gorki (now Nizhny Novgorod, Russia) but were arrested and sent back to the mines. On the way he saw Jews at a station beaten and attacked by dogs. He stayed at the coal mines until the end of 1940. In February 1941, he was sent to Kalinin to work in a textile mill and later became a foreman. When the Russian/German war began he helped dismantle the machinery to be moved far to the east. He ended up working in a textile factory run by Jews in Sverdlovsk, Russia. In 1942, he was contacted by the Jewish part of the Organization of Polish Patriots. Later, he was asked to go to the Ukraine with a group of 35. He was put in charge of 350 Polish workers at a farm. At this time, he knew Jews were persecuted but was unaware of the camps. In 1945, he returned to Lodz and learned that father had been in charge of a textile factory until 1944 when he was sent to Auschwitz. Zgierz purged of Jews by 1940. Brother gassed in Chelmno in 1941.

Krystal decided to go to Paris, although several French relatives had been killed in the camps. His grandfather survived beatings. He headed to Paris via several countries and a camp in Germany where he found a smuggler to help him get to Paris. He took a tailoring course in Paris and also became involved in publishing a youth journal. He met and married his first wife in Paris and she persuaded him to move to Australia, arriving in Melbourne December 27, 1950. They had a son who died in infancy (no other children). In Australia he became involved in a number of businesses as well as the Polish Bund and raised money to build a building for it as a cultural organization. He organized concerts with Jewish artists. Wife left him soon after arrival and he remarried in 1959. She later died from an aneurysm. He owned men's shops and dabbled in real estate development. He has donated money and his Judaica collections to Jewish organizations. He is still upset by Poles hating Jews.