

RG-50.407.0283

Oral History with Jefim Hasen, conducted on Dec. 4, 9, and 16, 2003

Summary

File 1, Part 1

Background

Jefim Hasen, born 1922 in Kutu, Galicia, Poland (now in Ukraine), describes his education in *cheder*, then a Polish school, and being sent to technical school in Warsaw; antisemitic incidents in school; a much older brother, born in 1907; his parents, Moishe Hasenfratz (which Jefim shortened to Hasen and pronounced *Hayzen*) and Rose née Klinger, landowners from his maternal grandfather, Yehuda Klinger; another brother, Mendel, born in 1910, Ari, born approximately 1920; two younger brothers; an older sister, born in 1911; a traditionally observant Jewish family life.

File 1, Part 2

September 1939

Leaving on foot for Tashkent with a large group of people, assisted by retreating Russian soldiers; claiming to be Ukrainian; being drafted by the Russians and sent to Iran to safeguard oil supplies; being trained to use mortars; discovering that some mortars and other arms he and others carried were being siphoned off to Haganah; being taken to Ashkhabad and imprisoned for 46 days and interrogated by the NKVD about this activity; being tried, denying knowledge of the destination of the arms, and being sentenced to death; being told to petition for leniency because of the need for labor; being resented to ten years at hard labor; being sent by train, first to Tashkent and then to the Sukhona River area to be used for hard labor projects, in particular, digging a canal; living in a work camp and developing friendships; inmates being of several nationalities, including Jews; working fourteen to fifteen hours a day, seven days a week; many laborers dying; surviving by finding ways not to work too hard compared to others; doing this for five years [note: followed by the remaining five years' sentence in the gulag] and wasting away but never being sick [note: contrasts with subsequent remarks]; some prisoners harming themselves to get time off to heal; maintaining strict self-discipline to ration food; having no belief in God; never stealing from anyone; never thinking about or imagining the future or a normal life; becoming a self-described *Muselmann* and spending three months in hospital [for Typhus], where he was deeply indebted to a female doctor who headed the medical unit and who treated him very compassionately and used him as an assistant.

File 2

The second five years of imprisonment being a normal life; being given a "responsible job" feeding the prisoners, as well as perks such as a private room with a bed; speculation on reasons he received favored treatment; his doctor patron becoming pregnant and losing her job, resulting in Jefim being sent to a "special camp" in Kolyma [a notorious Siberian labor camp], as a political prisoner, which he attributed to knowing too much about his boss; being

given his freedom but declared to be in permanent exile; based largely on experience gained under his doctor patron, finding a job in a hospital, where he remained for about two years; becoming a “sanitary inspector” and gaining welcome access to sources of food; witnessing increased antisemitism at the hospital in connection with the Stalinist doctors’ plot against the Soviet leadership in 1953; being permitted to return to Poland in 1957; returning to Lvov but then moving back to Kolyma to take advantage of an opportunity to earn more money; working in the camp until about 1961; having by then a wife and two daughters; moving in quick succession to Ukraine, Warsaw, Vienna, and Rome; taking a ship to Australia in 1961 and settling in Melbourne; the importance of teaching his children about Judaism and learning Yiddish; suffering from bouts of depression but being happy with his life and believing he did everything he could to succeed; feeling welcome in Australia and experiencing minimal antisemitism; having nightmares about his time of imprisonment but being determined not to dwell on the past. Shows several family photos beginning in the 1930s.