

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Oskar Schindler
April 22, 1970
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audiotaped interview with Oskar Schindler, conducted by Sigmund Gorson on April 22, 1970. The interview took place in Tel Aviv, Israel and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

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The reader should bear in mind that she or he is reading an English translation of the Polish/German transcript of the interview, rather than written prose. Insofar as possible, this transcript tries to represent the spoken word, but some uncertainties will inevitably remain regarding some words and their spelling. Thus, this transcript should be read as a personal memoir and not as either a researched monograph or edited account.

Oskar SCHINDLER

April 22, 1970

Translation

Q: This is April 22, 1970, and the time is about a quarter after eight pm, and I am sitting, in my room, at the hotel Hilton Tel Aviv, among friends from the old country, which I was raised together with them. I have the extreme pleasure, of having a gentleman sitting near by me, in my room, whom I am meeting now for the second time; and I have met him today about three o'clock, sitting and eating a delicious Israeli dinner at a restaurant owned by a fellow of the Jewish faith which, with whom I have spent tragic six years in Auschwitz concentration camp and other concentration camps in Nazi Germany. And every time I visit Israel, of course I'm eating at this restaurant; and among those diners today, I have met many friends, once again, same ones I've met last year being here, once before of course. And the gentleman who is visiting me tonight, after I have invited him, is a most extraordinary man. The story which I'm about to tell you, and I'm about to present this man; I will talk to him in his native tongue, and I'll try in my own way, interpret from German into English. Let me first give you a little background of this fine human being. This man happens to be a German national; he was a very, very high official in the German government. He is not a Jew, he is not to be considered as a German Jew; he is a German Christian, and he was a member of the so-called "Herrenvolk." This man, I will be frank in telling you, that I've checked that story today, and this story is so unbelievable, but however, tragically enough, it's true. But it is unbelievable to people who like to forget those days and people who like to hate, and people who are accusing all the Christians of adding and helping of liquidating the six million innocent Jews, women, men, and children. Now, this man has saved over thirteen hundred Jewish souls, I

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repeat, and I emphasize again, he has saved, single handedly, one thousand three hundred Jews from genocide during World War Two. Had he be caught by the Germans, he would be immediately executed; he also saved a few hundred Jewish women from the gas chambers of Auschwitz. He has received numerous medals from various governments, he is the holder of the highest medal from the Holy See, from the Vatican, from the Pope himself. He is the holder of several medals from the Israeli government. It has been established throughout the world and especially in Israel, United States several funds, to perpetuate also the memory of those Christians who helped, Jews, and especially a fund has been set up, to provide him with money for the rest of his life, where the funds are deposited in various banks, and supervised by people, from all over, who are really, remember, and who were saved because of this fine gentleman. I am reading now a excerpt from a book, which is before me, in English, it has been printed by the International Martin Buber Society and Peace Foundation. Now, this gentleman's name I like to repeat once again, his name is Oskar Schindler; he resides, right now in Frankfurt am Main, West Germany. Martin Buber, I'm sure that you all, ladies and gentlemen, remember him being one of the most famous Israeli philosophers, Israel has ever produced; he has passed away a few years ago. I am proud to say that I've got some of his books, back home. Now let me please read, something about this fine human being who is sitting right now here at my hotel room. "Oskar Schindler, Frankfurt am Main, the International Martin Buber Society and Peace Foundation has the honor, to bestow upon you, the Martin Buber Peace Prize, for your humanitarian rescue action during the last war, in saving several thousands of innocent victims of the Nazi fury, from a cruel death at the risk of your own and your family's lives in Krakow, Zab_ocie and in Plaszow, during the years 1940 - 1945, you have truly taken upon yourself, the noble and heroic role of being your brother's keeper; in a moment when Cain seemed to triumph, you have acted according to the talmudic apothem(ph.), where there be no men, endeavor to be a man in the true spirit of

Martin Buber, London, December the 4, 1967." And then, "Signed, Igor Stravinsky, live president, the Earl of Hearwood(ph.), Lady Diane Cupple(ph.), Lord Sorenson(ph.), Christopher Hollis(ph.), Yehudi Menuhin." Now may I as well add, Yehudi Menuhin, as you know, is the famous violinist; and also, "Camille Arhuning(ph.), honorary secretary." And now, my friends, I will try in my own way, to interview this fine, noble Christian. And, he does not speak English, and I will try to talk to him in his native tongue, which is German, and I, later on, will somehow try to translate into English. I like to add that, because of many of my friends, living in Philadelphia, who are the members of the Jewish New Americans, who were liberated by the Americans in 1945 in Germany, and some of them do not speak German, and some of them who do not wish to speak German, but they speak fluently Polish, I will ask my questions in Polish, and Mr. Schindler will answer in German; and this way, people who speak Polish would understand, and also people who speak German will understand. And now, I'm turning over the microphone for Mr. Schindler; I will ask in Polish: Mister Schindler, tell me something about your experience in Poland. What did you do? How did you save the Jews? How did it go for you. When did you begin to save Jews? At what time and in what country.

A:In 1939 I had a couple of dozen Jewish workers, arranged for normally, through the employment office; that was at a point in time when there was no ghetto yet, and no Mundówek. These workers were workers in the same way Polish workers were, and they felt relatively comfortable with me [in my factory]. When the SS began it's sadistic actions, the people tried to arrange a place for their families, daughters, brothers or relatives with me. Of course I was willing to take in these workers. I had a metal goods factory, an enamel goods factory, and had, originally, three quarters Polish workers. Later, when the ghetto was created, and the pressure on the mo-, on the life of the Jewish people got stronger, the sadism became more

pronounced, the Jews naturally tried to get into the companies of the so-called good Germans. Those were all Jews who had no fortunes and no money, who were forced, under the circumstances, forced to work for a living, to pursue a career. When the Krakow ghetto was liquidated, I had about 480 Jews, or 520 Jews. This Jewish workforce tried, when they were transferred to the concentration camp Plaszow, naturally tried to get out of the KZ and into a private factory. And I was willing, as long it stayed within the limits of the employment possibilities, naturally willing to take in these people. They were mostly additions to families, mischpoche to mischpoche, but, there also were some extraordinary cases where people were being persecuted, or they couldn't stand up for themselves anymore, and I employed these people in my factory. When a law was issued in the general-gouvernement Poland, that prohibited the employment of less than a thousand Jews outside of concentration camps, I raised the count of my workers to a thousand. [] if I had employment for a thousand people, but I took in these people from the KZ Plaszow, and I was forced to build my own factory ware house. This factory ware house was guarded by the SS, that means, it was a work or outside camp of the Plaszow concentration camp. So, I had these thousand people in my own care but next to me was the Fabryka Krakowska, Cracow Wire Factory, which belonged to a former minister Kucharski(ph.); and an air plane radiator factory NKF had rented the space, which employed 380 Jews. And they wanted to renounce on the 380 Jews, so that I took them into my barracks, which means I had to build extra barracks, to spare the people the liquidation. [] also two small businesses, the Jews of which also lived under my care and in my ware house. The SS guards were somewhat humane, since they were only there to prevent an escape. I also employed 700 free Polish workers in this business. I also had 1200 workers in the Sudetenland, and the, a glasswork where I manufactured vodka bottles, with 380 workers, only Poles were employed there, was Prokocim Glass Works. In the course of time, as the Russian front closed in on Krakow, I was forced to look for ways to

evacuate, or secure, my Jewish charges, or workforce. I set up a transfer business between Zwittau and Brüng in Czechoslovakia, in Brüsau-Brünnlitz. That was a work camp; administration wise, Brüsau-Brünnlitz belonged to the concentration camp Groß Rosen, curiously enough for men- and Auschwitz for women. The unpleasant thing was, that in the meantime these inmates from Krakow were being placed in the concentration camps, and I had to endeavor to get them out of the concentration camp Plaszow, as well as Groß Rosen, by [each individual] name. With sixty to eighty thousand women in Birkenau and Auschwitz that was a very strenuous task, but, I reunited the families again, and in 1945 with the arrival of the Russians, they experienced freedom. We had a few cases of sickness, but no victims of violence, and no victims of unnatural death, neither from 1940, to 1945. That means, all my people, that they entrusted me with, survived the war, except normal deaths caused by old age or heart attacks.

Q: Thank you very much, Mr. Schindler. And now I told him that I'm thanking him, for the little speech he gave us into my tape recorder, and I would like to add that I, that I have before me a book, which I have received from him, it's a pamphlet, to dedicate a synagogue, and also a huge monument in the sacred memory of the six million innocent killed Jews. One of the most famous prominent rabbis, who's the spiritual leader of a temple, of a prominent temple, which is a Jewish synagogue of course, of Los Angeles, California, the temple Bethiem(ph.). His name is Rabbi Yakov Pressmen(ph.), and permit me please to read something to you, the expression of love, from Rabbi Yakov Pressmen, the spiritual leader of temple Bethiem(ph.), Los Angeles, California, dedicating these few fine words to this fine Christian human being; and it says: "January the 9, 1969, to my friend Oskar Schindler, my friend (emphasized), because he established himself as every man's friend, by acts of love and kindness, and thereby as a true servant of the father of us all, for years I long to meet him, and never dare dream it

possible, now having met him, I am happy and proud. Signed Rabbi Yakov Pressmen of temple Bethiem(ph.), Los Angeles, California, United States of America." Now, I would also like to ask my friend, which I'm proud to call my friend, sitting near by, to tell me something more, something more in his native tongue, about the people he has saved, where they live right now. And again I will ask those question in Polish, and he will try to answer me those in German. Later on, of course, upon my returning, once I go on my radio show, I will rework this and put this in English, and I'm going to interpret his entire explanation. Mister Schindler, where are these people? Where do the people you saved live? Do they only live in Israel or in the (United) States? Are you in touch with them? Do they write to you now? Do they help you now? Do they invite you to where they live? What do you do? Where do you live? What do you live on?

A: Three years ago I was very sick; I had a small cement industry near Frankfurt and had to liquidate the business because of a heart attack. My pensions, or subsidies, can be recalled, they are not secure pensions; all in all I receive about \$250 from the German government, or its, its agencies. Furthermore I occasionally receive an extra support from the World Congress, from friends in America and also from friends in Israel when I am here on vacation. And for the past 10 years I have been with my friends here for 2 months every year. Several hundred of my friends live in Israel, and already we have over 150 [Sabres] here; indeed, we already have people here who had their Bar Mitzvah here, twins, so we have grown up [Sabres]. I have over 200 charges, or children, in New York; they are called Schindler Jews. In Los Angeles there are about 50, of course, in Buenos Aires, in Rio, etc. there are another 100. I believe, only 30 to 40 of our family, or our group still live in Poland. Contact has never, was never disrupted, because after the war was over, I immediately worked together with the JOINT in Switzerland to reunite the families and search for the survivors. And then I

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immigrated to Argentina, spent 12 years in South America, and am now, have been living in Frankfurt an Main now for 10 years. The contact isn't only through correspondence, it is personal, and if any of our friends, no matter, from Fireland to Alaska, comes to Frankfurt, he comes and visits me. It is not like going on the town, but one is glad to see one another again, and to talk, Plotki(ph.), Grotzkin(ph.), Saile(ph.), Kedisch(ph.), just as one experienced and survived the old times. For the coming years, I believe, it will be my greatest joy and task, every year, like now, we have the 25th anniversary of the liberation, in the Hilton on May 2nd; that is a quarter of a century after these sadistic and cruel times, and I hope, that all of my friends, healthy till 120 years, will be able to visit this festivity again and again.