

DONOR: SAUL LESZCZ  
INTERVIEWER: AMITAI AZUELOS  
DATE: APRIL 1, 1988

Tape Footage: Canada

1-164 Saul arrived in Canada in 1951. Since then he has taken an active role in the community. He has served as president of the United Retail Grocers Association, vice-president of the Canadian Jewish Congress Council of Winnipeg, vice-president of the Hebrew Sick Benefit Association and president of the Holocaust survivor's organization Shereet Haplaita. He has also served as chair of the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial Council, and as a national executive member of the CJC organized Holocaust Committee. He is currently serving his third term as president of the H. Levitt Yiddish Speaking Lodge, and is a board member of the Beth Israel Synagogue. He is also active with the JNF and the Va'ad Hair.

Background

165-475 Saul was born in Warsaw to a Chassidic family. He was one of seven children. His mother was widowed and looked after the children on her own.

When WWII broke out Saul and all of his siblings were married with children. They were enjoying a nice, middle class life.

Saul owned a mirror and glass factory with an older and younger brother. His eldest brother was a famous Rabbi in a small town near Lublin. He was often asked to settle problems in the Jewish community.

Before the war there were about 400,000 Jews living in Saul's area. In this Jewish area no stores or businesses were open on Shabbat, the street cars were empty, and no one worked or drove.

476-754 There was some anti-semitism, but Jews played an important role in the life of Warsaw. There were sometimes problems with anti-semitism in the park, and fights would break out among young men. The government did not officially support anti-semitism.

In 1938 Kristallnacht occurred. This was a pogrom against Jews in Germany. About 40,000 Jewish Poles who had lived in Germany for 20-25 years were thrown over the border to the Polish side, and had to be relocated. The Warsaw Jewish community had to look after them. That is when the Warsaw Jews started worrying.

Warsaw was a very civilized, modern city. There were seven Jewish daily papers so the Jews knew what was going on in the world.

756-832 There were 24 Jewish Members of Parliament in Poland. These leaders called for the Jews to leave, warning them that bad times were coming. They urged them to go to Israel. But the Jews did not listen. They were well established and

wanted to stay.

### WWII

834-1102 When the war began 200,000 Jews from small towns came to Warsaw, increasing the Jewish population to 600,000.

The war started on Friday, September 29. Saul went to work as usual, then had to run off the bus because of a bomb raid. The next day the Jewish district was bombed. The bombing was continuous, night and day. The city became a slaughterhouse. People could not get food, and there was no water and no electricity. It was close to Yom Tov.

On Yom Kippur the Jews could not get to synagogue. But every apartment building had a synagogue and people went there. The 'Shma Yisrael' they called out from every block still rings in Saul's ears.

At first the war started just against the Jews. The other districts of Warsaw were quiet and nothing was destroyed. The Jewish district was bombed day and night.

1103-1298 Poland lost the war after seven days. The government ran away. The Germans took about a month to occupy Warsaw.

People were grabbed off the streets to clean up the city. Saul got caught when he went looking for food. Thousands of people were put to work. The SS especially picked on the religious and beat them up. They were the worst victims. The SS cleared out everything from all manufacturers, business and stores.

Saul was at his brother's when he learned his home was destroyed. He went to his building and saw the front wall was ripped out. He was unable to save anything. There were so many dead people on the street it was difficult to walk.

1300-1508 Saul decided he had to run away. The Jews were lower than animals. He knew the SS style and couldn't stand it.

By the end of 1939 there were advertisements that a ghetto would be formed. Saul arranged to leave. Poland was divided between the Germans and the Russians. Warsaw belonged to the Germans. Many tried to get to Bialystok on the other side of the lake.

Saul knew he would not be alive long in Warsaw. There was nothing to eat and they were not allowed out. He had some money so he found a farmer, and with his wife, son and another couple, who were later killed in Bialystok, he paid him to take them across the lake to the Russian side. The farmer lived on the border and transferred many Jews. But he insisted husbands and wives travel separately.

1509 They travelled by canoe. Both the Germans and Russians lit up the lake. On the Russian side Saul went to a railroad station where he waited for his wife and son to arrive the next morning. They were free of the Germans, and immediately

felt the difference.

In Bialystok Saul got a job managing a mirror factory for the Russians. He got an apartment and had enough to eat.

They were fine until they had to register. On the registration form they were asked where they would like to go. Saul wrote down South America because he had family there.

About 40,000 Jews from Poland had come over to the Russian side. One day they were all taken to the railway station and locked up in box cars. They sat for a day, were given food and then travelled for about seven weeks to Russia. There were about 60 people in each car and about 100 cars or more. At the time Russia and Germany were not at war. Conditions in the box cars were terrible. Once in a while they were let out in the fields surrounded by soldiers for their natural bodily functions. There was no privacy. As they approached Russia they were fed.

1791-2001 Saul had lost everything. They were taken like animals. In Russia he worked for two years, until the end of 1942. They lived in a camp, and worked cutting wood in the bush nor far from Leningrad. The more wood they cut the more they got to eat. They were all city people who knew nothing about cutting wood. Some died from the cold, hunger and work. The younger ones adjusted.

Saul had no connection with anyone back home at this time. After one year he received a letter from his mother in Poland saying they were going through a hard time. The first year at the camp they received a Jewish paper from Moscow.

He did not know what had happened to his family until he was liberated in 1946.

2003-2096 Saul was transferred from the Siberian bushes for a warmer area in Middle Asia. There many died from dysentery and typhus. There was no medicine. It was tough. About 200,000 people, or 50%, survived the Russian camps.

2097-2230 At first the treatment at the camps was bad. They were taken out at midnight for interrogations in minus 40 weather. There were 30 people in a barrack and the door was always kept open. At the interrogation they were asked thousands of questions, and then told to sign a confession. Saul's said he was a policeman in Warsaw, and he refused to sign it because Jews had not been allowed to be policemen. Saul wasn't afraid.

They did not beat them.

2230-2371 Saul was cut off from the world for six years. He hoped the situation elsewhere was better. He did not know about concentration camps. When he was in Middle Asia, South African Jews sent them parcels.

### Liberation

In 1946 the Russians repatriated people to the German part of Poland. Those from the Russian side were not sent back. These were mainly Gentiles. Most Jews went

back to Poland. A few thousand stayed behind and were sent to Russian concentration camps.

2372-2456 Saul led a group of 750 Jews over the Russian-Polish border. The Poles threw stones at the train, saying they thought all the Jews had died. This was their greeting.

Saul went to Warsaw to look for his family. The streets were so destroyed he could not recognize them. The Jewish district was completely destroyed.

The Polish government was not strong enough to help resettle people after the war. There was strong anti-semitism.

2457-2678 The situation was very tough. A lot of Saul's friends were killed in Poland. The Poles killed many after the war. Saul stayed in Warsaw for a month. He had nowhere to go. UNRA and the JDC came to Poland and told people to go to Germany, Austria or Czechoslovakia where there was more help from social agencies.

AT the DP camps people were given 12,000 calories a day.

Most of the Jewish survivors were in German DP camps. There were thousands in each camp. They were set up with committees, and had government support and help from England and the USA. The Zionist movement organized kibbutzim to prepare people for aliyah.

Saul worked for the Hagana's Bricha taking people across the border, and transferring them illegally into France and then Italy.

In the camps they lived in one big room divided up for 10 families.

2678-2823 They were really displaced persons. UNRA helped some emigrate. After the war Jews did not want to reestablish themselves in Europe. Paris, Holland and Denmark were the exceptions to this.

The situation was the worse in Poland. The Poles had collaborated a lot, and would point out to the Germans who was a Jew and who was not.

When the war broke out a man who had worked for Saul for 15 years offered to hide him in his Gentile district. But Saul did not want to take that risk. There were some Poles who sacrificed their lives to save Jews.

2824-3159 Most of the concentration camps were in Poland.

After a month in Warsaw Saul went to a DP camp in Austria where he worked as a Jewish police. Everyone was sitting and waiting for they did not know what.

In 1947 Saul was sent to Germany where there was more help. At this camp, Newfreiner, Saul was one of 60 policemen watching the camp. This entitled him to better food. There were about 5,000 people in the camp. The police could

control who came in and out.

Many Jews were dealing on the black market.

Saul registered to go to Ecuador. He was married in Newfreiner but could not take his wife with him. He had to go first and then send her the papers.

For a while Saul lived on a kibbutz not far from the town of Kielce. Here people were preparing for aliyah. There was an old-fashioned pogrom in Kielce, where the Jews were accused of kidnapping a boy to use his blood for Pesach. Saul heard this on the radio. 47 Holocaust survivors were killed. It showed how far the Poles would go against the Jews, killing them for nothing. After two days the government took control and the missing boy was found.

3180-3317 As a policeman Saul watched over the open DP camp. All four corners were watched so the Germans would not come in and cause damage.

The Jews still kept their traditions, and would not eat traif. At night some would bring in cattle to a waiting shochet. The camps were completely independent. They could even keep out the FBI.

3318-3506 People came from the Working Circle in New York to register refugees as shoe makers and other specialists. Then they could go even if they had no family to sponsor them. Many registered as tailors. A lot left, many of them illegally to Israel by boat from Italy. Men and women had to be married if they wanted to travel together.

Throughout all these troubles Jews were always taking care of their fellow Jews.

Many religious became anti-religious, but many hung on it.

Saul thought he would go to Ecuador and from there to Israel.

#### Ecuador

In Ecuador Saul had hard times, but found that between Jews he always got help. He began peddling and got some help from JIAS.

Peddling was not an honorable profession but Saul needed to make money. He decided to organize a mirror factory. He ordered machinery and glass and the Jewish community lent him money. He intended to stay in Ecuador.

3507-3738 When he first arrived he was often invited to speak about the Holocaust. There were 6,000 Jews in his city. He was accepted. He was one of the first survivors to arrive there.

He hung on to his religion even though he had problems with G-d. His family had been good people. Why did this happen?  
Saul practiced traditional Judaism.

There were many mixed marriages in Ecuador. With a Czech and a Hungarian

Saul organized a mikvah with money given them from a wealthy German Jew. They were determined to convert those who had already intermarried.

In 1937 Saul's mother-in-law had left Poland for Ecuador.

Saul and his friends converted many. They were the Beit Din. They introduced the community to Brit Milah.

3739-3890 Saul got involved in the Jewish community. His machinery came and he opened his factory. He was an expert and made mirrors for everyone including MPs and the Vice-President. Business was very good.

Saul brought his wife from Munich where she had been waiting with her baby. He sent his older son to Spanish speaking public school. He paid back the money he owed. His son Chaim had a Bar Mitzva. He mixed a lot with Spanish girls. He was good looking. Saul borrowed money to send him to a New York yeshiva high school for three years.

Saul's wife heard that her sister and two brothers were in Winnipeg and wanted to visit them. The baby did not like the climate in Ecuador. His wife came to Canada and her family would not let her leave.

#### Canada

3891-4051 Saul waited a year to receive papers to join her in Winnipeg. Her relatives said Canada was a better place for them. Saul could not sell his business, so he finally trained a German Jew and sold it to him for almost nothing.

Saul came to Winnipeg. When he stopped in Montreal his relatives there asked why he would want to go on to Winnipeg.

He had hard times here and wanted to go back to Ecuador. His son was in the States. Saul worked for Shore Glazers and was fired because he would not work on Shabbat. Then he worked for Ben Haskins and was fired again. Newcomers were not liked.

Saul went to the old Talmud Torah on Charles to daven. He met a Mr. Melamed who had a store on Ellice. Saul told him his work problems and Mr. Melamed offered to sell him his grocery business. Saul was so upset he agreed to buy it without even seeing it.

At first Saul closed the store on Shabbat, but he could not make a living.

4052-4105 Saul wanted to go into the glass business here but was told he would need a half million dollars. He only had \$4,000.

He worked very hard, seven days a week including Shabbes, and made a living. He brought his son Chaim to Winnipeg when his American visa expired.

Saul has no complaints now. He is glad to be here. He has a nice family.

4106-end

Saul does not think the Holocaust could happen again the way it did. The Germans knew the Poles would not object. It could not happen again on such a big scale. But the Jews should always be on their toes and well organized. Poland was made up of Poles and Ukrainians. There were not many other nationalities like there are here. If Israel had been around Saul is sure one or two million Jews would have been saved.

Many Jews on ships were sent back. Everyone was against them.

Saul's is only part of the story.

It is important to Saul that his family stick to the traditions. When Jews were on the lowest level of life they did not forget they were Jews.

Canada is one of the nicest countries in the world.