

LEON HOLZ

CZECHOSLOVAKIA/ISRAEL/SWEDEN/CHILE/CANADA

WORLD WAR II

Interviewed by

Renia Perel

&

Sylviane Feder

(August 15, 1990)

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Interviewee: Leon Holz (H)

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Interviewers: Renia Perel (R), & Sylviane Feder (S)

R: Okay, this is what we are interested [in]. When you said the history, the first information about your birth place before the Holocaust, like how many people were there. Not a long history, just 2000 or 5000...

H: Well, I tell you whatever you ask me, I tell you whatever, there were...

R: So this history could tell us maybe how many people lived? ... So you can skip the historical.

H: No, I well tell you. No it doesn't say how many people... may I read it?

R: The spelling of the places.

H: The sources for this material, I can translate if you want [me] to, because the sources which were at the disposition of the historic Jewish community of Prossnitz, so was the rabbi from Posen, Poznań [Poland] later, Dr. Freiman was very limited. It was a protocol book to the community with inscription from the years 1722 till 1792 and the protocol book to the community Gemilut Khasadim, which is from 1725 till 1864, but it doesn't say...

R: We are recording already.

H: Oh, I will read [it then]. So you know there are old, old information which I got from a lady in Tel Aviv who was born in Prossnitz, her parents were close friends of my parents but it doesn't say, it's only...

R: We are interested basically in the last period just before the Holocaust of the Jewish life and we can add of the history that in this place began to flourish with the Jewish life in the 1700's so we can add that and we can read it on your own.

H: Ya. I can give you just a few hints here, for instance,

just a minute...the Jewish community and then significance, the local industry, after the Protestants have left the city which came under Catholic domination. In the year 1639 there were in Prossnitz, 64 Jewish houses with 143 Jewish inhabitants. This number [of Jews] grew after the Jewish community received... how do you say... received people who flew [fled from] the Khmelnitzki Pogroms and the Jews who were rejected from Vienna. Anyway, I repeat it now, the number of Jewish persons increased by the survivors of the Khmelnitzki Pogrom and [by] the people who were forced to leave Vienna. In the year 1669 there were 64 Jewish families, in the year 1676 was the inauguration of the first synagogue. The inauguration sermon was performed by Rabbi Calib Feiber but its first rabbi in Jewish community in Prossnitz was Isaac Khais Ben Avraham and later the rabbi of the whole province [Moravia] was Menakhem Khrokhmal and Nakhum Trebitsch.

There was a fight between the Jews and the Catholic community but it was a fight just of economical character. In 1713 the amount of Jews amounted to 318 families with 1,393 people. In 1798 there were already 1,459 Jews in the city. According to the law there were admitted 328 Jewish families. The Jewish community of Prossnitz was very strongly influenced by Shabbetai Zevi and one of the leaders of this movement was Judah Leib Prossnitz and later on he was one of the first communities which accepted the idea [of] the Haskala.

In 1843 there started the first Jewish elementary school for Jewish and Catholic children. 1831 started [by] the Jew from Prossnitz, Feit Ehrenstamm, a factory which was the beginning of the modern Jewish textile industry. In the year 1842 there was in the city 135 Jewish textile merchants and in the year 1859 they established from Meyer

and Itzhak Mandel the first factory for ready-made clothes.

R: I read German, and all these dates for the historical purpose we can make a Xerox copy and translate it. We are interested now, we need to come... it's a good beginning for the story of the industrialization and I will take this - a monument - and so this is the thing which we can translate.

H: Please be careful with that I can't get it back. That's a photocopy which this lady produced to [for] me, it's Mrs. Ruth Federmann, she was born in Prossnitz. I can produce [for] you a photocopy, it's no problem. She came to Israel with the children [i.e. the youth Aliya] from Prossnitz. Today her husband [whom she married in Israel] is one of the co-owners of the Dan Hotel in Israel and I am on quite friendly terms with them.

R: That is beautiful. Where were you during the Holocaust period, or can you tell us how you survived?

H: I will give you the story in a nut-shell. The Holocaust period, I have to start a little bit earlier. You know, we could see the signs coming up. We didn't believe it, nobody did.

R: What year was that?

H: 1938. I will jump a little bit. There was, in September 1938, obligatory military service which I was involved in, naturally, as I was in the Reserve, in the Czech army. In September 23rd of September, in those days I was engaged and it was a Friday night. Next day I was supposed to come to Prague [to meet my fiancée], you know, it was already after the annexation of the Sudetenland by the Germans, you know, and my fiancée, she was residing in Teplice-Sanov [which] was in Sudetenland and they moved to Prague. Anyway, I was supposed to go to Prague the next day and when I came home about, between 10 or 11 whatever. We put on the radio and there was a general calling to arms. So my brother and I ...

R: What was his first name?

H: Fritz. He's now living in Stockholm in Sweden. We were expecting it really, any day already, and we have already our things all packed, a pair of shoes, some underwear, and this [etc.]. So we took the train and joined our military units. I was down there at the Hungarian border, you know, this night, we thought already we were at war with Germany. We left home it was about 11 o'clock at night, 11:30 to 11:45 p.m.

R: Which army did you join?

H: The Czech one, sure, both of us were members of the Czech army and, well, we left home, my dad blessed us and we left. Anyway we joined our respective units, my brother was sent to the Polish border and I went to the Hungarian frontier. I was supposed to join my unit in Užgorod in Zakarpat, Russia, it was the eastern part of Czechoslovakia but after the war it was taken by [annexed by] Russia. It is Russia today [Ukraine in fact], Užgorod.

We started marching, taking up our positions. So we were in arms, my group, my age group was demobilized on November 23rd. I was there two months. And when I came back, my fiancée and I, we decided immediately to get out [of the country]. Unfortunately, very unfortunately, when we wanted that my parents would leave with us, we knew how it was. "No way, first you go and once you're established [settled] in parnosse [making a living], we'll follow" ... [tears]... I'm sorry.

R: Don't be sorry, I have tears too. That's why we are doing it.

H: So we started, whatever, possibility we could investigate [as to] how to get out. My fiancée's parents had decided to leave the country too. We got married on the 11th [of] December 1938. And now we were preparing how to get out, which was very, very difficult.

S: Can I just ask one question? You were only militarized for

two months?

H: Yah, that's in 1938, in 1938, don't forget that's a different story. Look even those two months, there was a hell of a lot of shooting, Hungarians. There were bunkers, anyway that's not interesting. There was the same story, for instance, in Slovakia. There were, they called them "Hlinka Guard," you know, a similar thing to like the SS or the SA. Just if you, a couple of times... when I was on duty at night time, you know, oh yes, it came, wait a minute, there was a conference of Godesberg was in September. [British prime minister] Chamberlain, and they [Germans] got the Sudeten. Then in October there was the conference in Vienna [Munich, in fact] with Mussolini and the Hungarians got part of Slovakia. So we had to retreat but still, you know, according to the agreement they had with the Hungarians, whoever was born in that part which was ceded to Hungary became Hungarian. Who were those people? Jews. And those "sons-of-bitches" [Hlinka Guard] came sometimes in the middle of the night, to the Jewish families.

R: The Hlinka Guard you're referring to?

H: Sure, big, big anti-Semites. There were a few opportunities I had, very few, when I just came upon one or two families who had just been told by the Hlinka Guards to get out, see, don't forget in those days I was 29 years of age, I was young. When the "pakhad", you know, I didn't know, you know what pakhad means? "Pakhad" in Hebrew is "fear." So I could not say they were trying to escort them. I just simply drew my gun to let them [the Hlinka Guards] know [that I was serious] or I shoot you another so.....I still remember these words ["Get off their backs?"], I had the opportunity a couple of times to say it. A few families, how few!

Anyway on November 23rd we were demobilized, I came home and on December 11th we married and now we tried to get

out one way or the other. There were very few ways. And finally we managed to come in, in one of those illegal transports which were organized, not by a Jewish organization. I still remember that one of the organizers of this transport. We went, we left finally, it was a Greek fellow. And well, money, money, we bribed, and they accepted us.

R: This is a very important point that you have just said, and when we write about it we need to be clear. You tried to join this illegally organized transport in order to escape and it was headed by a Greek fellow and you had to pay money to get in and where would they take you? That's very important.

H: They said it's going to Israel. They told us it's going to Israel, the goal was Israel, but we knew, we are leaving by train to Vienna and we left on the 31st of March [1939] [or the 30th of April], finally, we left by train from Prague. There were still a few [most] unpleasant situations, you know, we were already in the compartments, each of us was allowed to take just a knapsack, one knapsack out.¹ You know, a hell of a lot of people, crowded, younger people, elderly people, a lot of nervousness. You know for instance, one of those knapsacks fell down, there was a thermos bottle, yah, it split and it stained the shoes of one of the SA men, "Whose knapsack is it?" "Mine." "Out." His next station was the concentration camp. Out of the transport and cases like this were several, you know? So there was one thing, to keep quiet, quiet.

¹Leaving Prague we were permitted to carry with us only the knapsack and 10 German Marks. We had to be on the railway station at 2 p.m. The train left at 10 p.m. We were not allowed to leave our compartments which were terribly overcrowded.

Anyway we left Prague and arrived the next day in Vienna on the Danube Channel. You know there's a certain place they call the Danube Canal. The whole transport was about 650 people. We boarded on the Danube Canal in Vienna. We boarded two tiny little boats who [which] originally were for tourists excursions on the Danube which, under normal conditions, is a beautiful thing. We boarded those two boats, each of those tiny little nutshells, with the capacity of 120 people and those two boats with a capacity totally of 240 people had to absorb 650 people. So one of the fellows there were...it's transport... elected or chose our own leaders of the transport and one of the fellows always had to be on the bridge and direct, "More people on the left side, more people on the other side" to prevent the boat from capsizing.

So that was the trip, [under normal conditions] it was a beautiful trip, you know. We went through Budapest on the Danube, past the parliament which was beautiful. We had plentiful [plenty] of food. I can't say otherwise. We passed Semlin, Belgrade, Yugoslavia and then in the tiny little villages in Rumania, time and again, there came loads and loads of Jewish people with food, but the boats didn't stop. Very few times. Anyway so finally we arrived on the Delta of the Danube, it was Sulina in Rumania. You know the delta there are three arms.

There was a boat, another nutshell of 1500 tons, a boat of 1500 tons, a nutshell. On this boat the sanitary conditions were not exactly first-class. The committee we elected were objecting to the SS [who was present in Sulina supervising our boarding]. We went on the "Chovo SS" the whole trip. "You don't like it, O.K. come on, let's go back to Vienna." Anyway we [had no choice], each of us had 35 cm [of] room to lay down, sit, I couldn't sit down. See, when I had to take [put] on or take off my

pants I had to lay down, because there was not enough room. Anyway so that was it. We were provided with food for up to a week because we've been told, well, it will take less than a week and we reached the coast of Israel, Tel Aviv. We knew, that there are still some problems ahead because there was British blockade, you know.

So on we went but slowly and slowly... ya. We approached... a beautiful trip... the Bosphorus, Istanbul and so on. Well, we had to be underneath the deck, but still you know, a "boychick" of 29, 30 years....

R: How many people were there, 1500?

H: No, 650. The boat had 1500 tons.

S: When you said 35 cm, was that the width you had?

H: That was the width of the bed, to sleep, to lie. Sit, I couldn't. I told you when I wanted to put on or take off my pants I had to lie down to dress or undress. Next over was the next shift already, it was like sardines, you know.

Anyway, finally we approached the coast of Israel, Tel Aviv by way of Istanbul, the Black Sea, the Dardanelles, the Mediterranean, and to Tel Aviv, and we have been told, well, tonight we disembark. Whatever there was in tins we had and foodstuff we gave it to the crew. What for should we shlep with the knapsack, the jars or whatever. O.K., but there was a but [bump] a tiny little but [bump], we didn't even know it was land. And off we went again to the sea, to the Mediterranean. And now we were cruising, cruising, cruising. Nobody would let us in, no way to land, nowhere. We were getting short of foodstuff. Then there developed a very precarious situation.

R: So, you are now on the boat and you were planning to disembark, but no one is letting you disembark. So you have the foodstuff.

H: No, we didn't have the food anymore.

R: No, because you gave it away.

H: We gave it away to the crew.

R: So the boat is standing?

H: Just cruising in the Mediterranean because no one would let us land [dock]. And food was getting scarce, what was worse, drinking water was getting scarce. We had to put guards in front of the drinking water, you know, only for sick or elderly people. It came to that extent that the sanitary installations were none, so we had some nondescript things which we had to put with some wood or bunkers to relieve us and then everybody has to take a rope to let it down into the sea. Meanwhile, now and then you.... [end of tape]

Interviewee: Leon Holz (H)

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Interviewers: Renia Perel (R), & Sylviane Feder (S)

H: Anyway, you know, hunger is a very painful thing. And hunger can bend even a human will. What we had to confront all of a sudden, there were women who for [a cup of] soup [and a slice of bread] went down to the crews habitation far away. So we had to try to stop it some way. We did. Finally we discovered, you know we couldn't even shave, because with salty water, no way you can, electric shaver I didn't have! Soap doesn't foam with salt water. Once a week we could shower, it means a few buckets to throw sea water, one at each other.

Finally we discovered where they are keeping their own foodstuff, the crew. As I told you [I was] 29 years [old]. I could do anything. I was not the only youngster, so finally we discovered where to open part of the planks [to the storage rooms] of the boat. We got a hold of a rope - two guys hold the rope. I was climbing down on the rope to the Magazin [storehouse], to the food Magazin. If they would have caught me they would have killed me. They didn't. Anyway, we got some foodstuff, somehow. [Telephone rings. Mr. Holz answers. Tape is stopped.]

One thing...later we discovered the purpose of the transport that besides that we were paying in Prague for the transport with cold cash, the purpose of the transport was to get hold of our passports. We had to hand them over our passports. In those days 1938, 1939 it was big business, passports, you know, I'm always forgetting those things. You know when we left, naturally, that was one of the preconditions was to have a valid passport. I always

had a passport, my wife had a passport, her mother, but her father didn't have a passport. The time was too short to get a faked passport so what to do.

As I told you, in those days, today, myself, I can't understand, how crazy I was. You know what I did? My father-in-law says he didn't have a passport, Adolf Neumann, and he had an encounter [a brawl] before they left Sudetenland. He [had] slapped a German across his face [and said to him:] "You Nazi swine." You can imagine what that means. Well, but this was still Czechoslovakia but now the Germans were in Prague already and we were in Prague. You know, funny enough, I've never been taken for Jewish, I never hid it, I didn't hide it, but I didn't run around here with an inscription, "I'm Jewish, you see?" It was even when the Germans marched into Prague, it was March 15th, 1939. We had, my wife had some jewels which we handed over to the jeweler to transform them, let's say [in order] to take them easier out [of the country] with us. Now the Germans marched in. I remember still the morning, 7:00 o'clock in the morning my mother-in-law came to our flat, to our bedroom, we were still asleep, "Get up kids, get up, the Germans are here." What I did, I got dressed, shaved. "I'll try to get the jewels back as they are, transformed or not transformed." And off I went. I had to cross one of the main streets, the Grand Prague, and there were already, from all directions pouring in the the Germans soldiers in formation. German policemen already directing the traffic and son on. To cross the street, well I crossed it and I raised my hand ["Heil Hitler" salute]. That's it. I came to the jeweler, got the jewels and now I got scared. Look, if they would have caught me, empty, the pockets empty, so what, but jewels, jewelry in my pockets, I'm that way, out.

R: They know right away [that you are a Jew?]²

H: So anyway, I did the same thing, crossed the main street, like this [with my hand up, "Heil Hitler" salute] and came home with the jewels. that was one thing. I repeated, today I don't know how I did those things in those days, but I told you, in those days, the word fear didn't exist for me. Now I needed a passport for my father-in-law. To get a passport, a correct passport, authorized by the Germans, we needed an authorized exit [visa].

People started to form queues at midnight to get to the passport office the next day. Anyway I went up there, it was close to the Vltava, to the Moldau [River] and March was chilly. I was wearing you know those green "hitls" [caps] and I was relying on the fact that they won't take me for Jewish. The first guard was a Czech policeman, he says, "What do you want." I replied, "Secret Police."³ He let me go. Up there the second guard again, "What do you want?" [I said,] "Secret Police." [He said,] "Show him the way." And I came to the German official there, a civilian. You know, my German always was flawless, I was raised bilingual, Czech and German. I came to the official, "Was kann Ich für sich tun?" [In English] "What can I do for you?" And I accepted the German way of speaking, "I need a passport." [The German official said:] "What's the name?"

²H: They would have interrogated me *their way*, you understand? By the way, having the jewelry in the pockets of my coat, it would have made very little difference if I am a Jew or a non-Jewish Czech. In hindsight, I don't know from where I took the courage. We were not yet aware of the potential dangers or future horrors. Since March 15th, when the Germans marched in to Czechoslovakia, the air was tense, like with electricity. 100 bombers cruised over Prague, to scare the population in case of potential resistance. We used to meet at night - a few people - to discuss or comment about the possibility of leaving the country. Sometimes a couple was missing; we never asked if they are among the lucky ones who left the country, or if they are arrested by the Gestapo.

³I turned the lapel of my coat pretending to have some proof that I am from the secret service. I impressed him with my attitude.

Adolph Neumann, Adolph Neumann. I still remember so vividly. "Don't you think I might have read this name on a certain list?" [I replied,] "I think you are mistaken," and slowly I took out a bundle of bills, just to let him [see. I again said] "You're mistaken, you're most certainly mistaken." [He said,] "It could [be] maybe" and I put [a bigger bundle of] bills on the table, [finally he said] "Yah, it could be that I'm mistaken" and I put it on the table and in five minutes I had the passport. Out I went.

S: How much did it cost you?

H: I don't know. In those days, money, I didn't count it. Luckily enough, look I wasn't a rich man, neither were my parents, but I used to make money and I had money always. That was not the object, the object was to get a passport and to get out, you know, and then on the boat, I wanted our passports back. And with us on the boat, on this boat of 1500 tons there was the man from one of the organizers of the passport. He was a Frenchman, Monsieur Marcelle. And I approached him and told him, "Monsieur Marcelle," I used to speak French too, "Est-ce que je peux parler avec vous?" "Could I talk to you, but very confidential." O.K., let's meet on the deck, 11:00 o'clock at night, "O.K." Look, I was no tiny little fellow and with 29 or 30 years I had a little bit of "koykhas" [strength], still he was a sturdy fellow, a young man. If he would have jumped me [and thrown me] into the sea, nobody would have said a single word. Nobody would have known. Maybe hours later, my family would have discovered that I'm not on the boat anymore. Luckily enough, I got the passports. He gave them back to me.

S: Did you have to pay for them?

H: No, no, I just had a very friendly talk with him, and I told him, I said to him, "Mr. Marcelle, look, today you are on this boat, we are refugees, we are leaving the country, think it over, I wish you should never be in the

same situation, but who knows?" He was a Frenchman, you know, with the Germans, they are beasts. He started to look at me and gave me the passports.

R: Were the passports for everyone or just for your family?

H: No, just for my family. Look, I couldn't for everyone. There were 650 people on board. He would have never, it would have been ridiculous. But you know, then on the boat we were cruising, no one let us in.

S: How long were you cruising like that?

H: I give you the total account, we had food for eight days, the transport lasted three months. Meanwhile we went up to Syria to Beirut.

R: Go slowly now, that's an important story. Like you went back to the passport story, but now you are returning to the story on the boat and the cruising...

H: There started hunger.

R: The hunger began.

H: Finally the crew landed somewhere in Turkey, or whatever, must have been south of Istanbul, whatever, and they brought some live animals on board. Well hunger is a very bad thing. One of our guys had a gun. What we did, well I was not the only young fellow on the boat, so we organized it, by word of mouth, kids, women, elderly people, everything [everybody] down underneath the deck. And we were about two dozen boys, we were. We produced a "Mutiny on the Bounty," a mutiny, out, we took there the captain we took prisoner, one gun and a few guys. Conditions to set him free, whatever animal is on board, to be divided [in] equal parts among everybody. So there had to be in a short time, the crew was supposed to be in the same position of passing hunger as we were. Anyway, finally we left. I might even give you a chronological [account] ... We left Prague on March 31st [April 30th], we boarded those tiny little ships on the Danube the next day, we arrived in Sulina [Rumania] the 25th of April [May], boarded the ship, the name was, it was a very ill-fated

ship that was quite well known. Frasula was the name. And finally they let us in Syria, in Tripoli, close to Beirut. In Tripoli it was "quatorze de juillet," the 14th of July, that's the French national holiday, 1939 and there there was a beautiful, beautiful naval parade, not in our honour but it was quatorze de juillet, the 14th of July, a big, big, big French holiday. We didn't understand at first if the French perhaps or French or Arab policemen came on board. Each of them [had] a handkerchief in front of their nose. We were stinking, stinking, can you imagine we couldn't wash properly, we were stinking horrible. Anyway they directed us from Tripoli to Beirut and in Beirut we had the luck, the commander of the French garrison was a fine, fine person, colonel from Alsace-Lorraine, a fine, fine guy. First thing he ordered [us] off the boat and we were transported to a transport [transit] camp for Mecca pilgrims. A transition camp for Mecca pilgrims. No luxury, definitely, there was just a wooden plank and another wooden plank to deposit the head and that's it. But you know when we entered this whole receipt [reception] for those Mecca pilgrims it was like entering paradise for us. We were walking there were greens, there were fruits, there were figs, there were this and that, well the next consequence was that out of 650 people, 400 people became sick. Our stomachs were not anymore used to digesting and then there were further consequences, we were walking and there were scorpions. You know what is a scorpion? Some of the people were badly bitten, it's terribly, terribly painful. Anyway...

R: Excuse me, I just want to ask, do you remember the name of the person who allowed you off the boat, that fine person, he was a Frenchman? And the Mecca pilgrims was this a camp especially, a transition place [for them]?

H: Yes, he was French. A colonel. It was not a camp, there were walls, very thin oriental style walls, very thin walls, there were let's say rooms with 30 or 40 wooden

planks which served as beds.

R: Oh, I see, so this is a transition sort of place.

H: A transition camp for Mecca pilgrims, you know. Anyway there we had plenty of food. The French provided for plenty of food... Unfortunately there I got sick, first I got as a consequence of the bad food on the boat, because in the end on the boat we had only rotten potatoes, some soup combined with I don't know with what liquid ever. Anyway I got dysentery. You know on this cot, whatever it was where I was laying, every five minutes there was an opposite door on the other side of this room, there were the lavatories. And have you ever seen, I'm talking of pre-Mussolini times, lavatories in Italy, just a hole, you had to get out somewhere and you had to aim. That was in Beirut, naturally, but there is one thing, if we are healthy you get out somewhere and you make it, somehow, but if you are weakened, you have fever and you are having cramps, so, anyway, I did it, I came back and was up and down open. I hardly laid down on the cot again and I had to run again, and again. Anyway, somehow I got out of it, you know luckily enough, I touch wood, I was never in my life sick, except this [time]. I got to myself again and then I was bitten by a, I got tropical fever, you know, it's the consequence of a bite by a certain insect [sand fly], they call it pappataci [fever]. Pappataci, you know, is a Greek name. It's a five day fever but you get weakened, I was not able to close my fist, completely debilitated. Now finally we had to leave, that was another problem. It was the time, there started some disturbance with the Arabs in Israel, Tel Aviv. The trouble is, Jüden [Jews], they can't keep their traps shut. No way. It became public already in Israel and in Tel Aviv [that] there are Jüden [Jews] in Beirut, a transport of 650 illegal refugees. The consequence there were some disturbances in Tel Aviv and the French were forced to tell us, "Get out" and we had to. Anyway you know on [the]

high sea there was another transport of Polish Jews meanwhile some 800 people. So they decided that, a Jewish organization, to get them somehow out or whatever so maybe through the blockade because we Czechs, we were already Germany invaded territory because Hitler invaded us on March 15th. But Poland was still a free Poland, [in Polish] "Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła ["Poland has still not disappeared" - Poland's national anthem], "Ale zginąć musi" ["But it has to disappear"]. Anyway so they decided we have to get all of us on the bigger ship, it was not big enough for 1400 or 1500 people but anyway and the Polish should declare them, if ever asked, they should say they are Czechs, German invaded territory already. Anyway I was not able to walk so they transported me on a stretcher, the tiny little boat, it was at night time. Even with the very calm sea it's moving, so we came to the boat. [A man said,] "One, two, three, hup," but they threw me a split of a second too late, I was up till here in the sea already. Anyway, believe me, the Arabs are saying "Alleh inshallah," God is great ["if God wills"]. Somebody grabbed me and they dragged me out on a tiny ladder. You know, those emergency ladders and they dragged me out to the boat. Let's say [so] that nobody should step on me, I couldn't move, I couldn't even talk, I was completely debilitated, so they put me underneath the table. Later on I discovered everything. You know they put me underneath the table, [so] nobody should step on me. Yuh? And that's the way we drove to Tel Aviv. You know the crew of the boat, finally they told us, "Look, Tel Aviv that's over there, yah, if some wind or whatever is swaying the boat left or right, we'll have to make either be like that or like that" [move the rudder accordingly]. Fine. They took all the instruments, because, if they would have been caught by the English by the British, it was smuggling people, a very severe crime. So they left the boat taking all the instruments with them, compasses and left the

boat. O.K. so out boys were running the boat. We were approaching Tel Aviv, could see already the lights of Tel Aviv and all of a sudden, out of the blue came a British gunboat, "Stop." If they would have wanted to stop, they didn't know how to stop, another "Stop." After the third "Stop," we were machine gunned. Well, two people were dead. The one thing they could do, turn around, on open sea again. Well, but there was no alternative, there was no food on the boat, no drinking water, there were kids, elderly people and so on. So meanwhile the people got the news in Tel Aviv and there were big demonstrations in the Jewish part. Next night we turned around, straight ahead Tel Aviv. It was Shabbas nacht from the 1st to the 2nd [of] September, when the war started [the night Germany attacked Poland].

You know people told us afterwards they were sitting, "Have you ever been in Tel Aviv? [Do] you know where Cafe Pilz is? On the HaYarkon [Street]. Shabbas nacht, Friday evening, dancing and so on. Everybody went out to get a hold of as many people as possible from the ship. I couldn't walk, I was on the boat, still had to wait until the police came that took us over and they interned us in a former German colony there close to Tel Aviv, Sarafand. So we've been interned by the British. Well, they let us loose after a certain time and that was our arrival in Israel. When I arrived they put me on my feet, I collapsed, I had lost about fifty pounds of my weight. Fifty pounds is a hell of a lot, and no food and so on. Anyway at 29 almost 30 years of age you get on your feet again. I was never a weakling, I was very fat, I had a good spot of education and believe me, you know, in Czechoslovakia there was obligatory military service, eighteen months. The best thing a youngster can go through. The best thing. First of all it's a tough education, you learn self-domination, you know, you get

the message. The first time you get a big order on the left wing to report you get two days after a serving, but three days, by I need four days, finally, you get the message, "yes sir" and that's the best thing in military service. Today's youngsters they don't know it, and they are weak. So anyway I got [back] on my feet and that's the story.

The next thing [was] to get a parnosse [earn a living], it was very hard but still, you know, in those days the spirit in Israel was unique. Look we were from this transport forced on this boat, we were marked people. You can imagine after such a time not being properly fed and [after] what we went through and so on and so on we went through the streets of Tel Aviv and people, September, and September is still a nice, nice time in Israel, people were asking us to come in, sit down, have a refreshment and the next question, "Nu, you're settled already?" Go to this and this direction, here's a relative of mine, maybe he can help you and if he can't he'll give you another direction. So we have been really helped, you see, the first days, for instance, we got food and some public... you can't call it restaurants, we got, anyway, we got food....⁴ [end of Tape 1]

⁴H: When we left the Sarafand camp - which later became a British military camp - we got into a public kitchen. For only one piaster we got a lunch. A piaster was 1/100 of a pound. [You know, the Palestine pound was equivalent to the British pound. The exchange rate was then, approximately, \$4 U.S. to the pound, except the Palestinian pound had 100 piasters, or, as it was called, 100 grushim.] These were only temporary arrangements; then we had to look for ourselves. In the Arab market, we bought for one grushim-piaster, 100 oranges, as much as we could fit into a knapsack. So we filled our stomachs with oranges. To give it some taste, everybody got a slice of bread and a slice of sausage in between. You know, I was 30 years of age and always hungry. The situation was very bad. No jobs. No way to get employed.

Interviewee: Leon Holz (H)

Date of Recording: Aug. 15, 1990

Ident. Number:

Track Number: T2-S1 (3/4 is blank tape)

Interviewers: Renia Perel (R), & Sylviane Feder (S)

H: Anyway we didn't go hungry [in the beginning].

R: So the Israelis, the spirit was so strong in Israel that they took care of you, first fed you, then when they felt that you were able to start to look after yourself they advised you where to go and if one didn't help you then another did. That was the situation?

H: Look they established, there were, for instance, the Oleh Czechoslovakia, the Oleh Polonia [Poland], Oleh Austria, for the Austrian refugees, for the Czech refugees, places to go and to ask and to find out if there is something.

You know, the first job I had when I finally could walk, I did a department store, in a tiny little briefcase, you know what I discovered among those Yiddele, you know, Magid Morot [Hebrew, "sweet ladies"], I discovered a business. I got commission, coffee, tea. Look, I tell you the whole story in one single word, I started peddling. I was not the only one. There was a doctor, an architect, a former manager, whatever, peddling, coffee and tea and soap. The soap was smelling from the coffee, the coffee was smelling from the soap. Anyway that was my first job and here again, look, I remember it was in Rekhov Ben Yehuda [Ben Yehuda Street in Tel Aviv]. I went to a perfumery or whatever it was, I got the directions from other people and I asked them, "Would you trust me with a few pieces of soap?" Because the coffee and the tea, that was no business, that was penny business, that was nothing. But the other business was not big business either. Anyway, so I asked them "Would you trust me with some limited amount of your "skhoyre" [merchandise] and I

start selling it? "At night time I [will] come back, and [for] what I [have] sold I [will] pay you and here you replenish my stock." And there were two partners, Austrian Jüden [Jews] and they looked at me and said, "You know, I think we can trust him." And they gave me "skhoyre" [merchandise]. Okay, next day in the afternoon I came back to settle accounts so they said "Okay, but you have to live on something, keep it meanwhile and come back after a week, meanwhile we provide you with more soap or toilet paper or skhoyre," and so I started. But still it was, you know, I was no bullet whatever. I was no big shot, [just] a young fellow in Europe in Czechoslovakia.

S: What were you doing before the War?

H: Before the War I was in the textile business in ladies clothes, coats and so on. But peddling, to go from door-to-door, it's tough. You know, you have to survive. Hebrew I learned quite soon, I'm luckily enough, no [problem] matter of mind, I'm gifted for languages and besides I was fluent in Hebrew when I was a "boychick" of 15, 16 years. Because we always were very Zionist oriented and I was fluent in Hebrew. Then I forgot it. [When] we are not talking a language, it's evaporating. But anyway, you know, we had to survive, and I didn't know yet fluent Hebrew, but Yiddish "Bederech Gekimen," you know? How you say, but when you came in the beginning, well for me, again, it's toilet soap, and this soap, and the Giveret [lady] is talking [saying], "Moshe sugt 'Ich darft nicht,'" [Moshe said,] "I don't need any"... "Who is forbidding you?" 'Ich darft nicht' means "I don't need." Versteht? [Do you understand?] Which in German means "I'm forbidden, I shouldn't" ["I'm not allowed"]. She would say "I have enough" and that was true. Look, I'll give you another example, this comes later. In the meantime I got a job, I heard there was a possibility in the Port of Jaffa, the Arab Trägers [porters]... to transfer on my shoulders sacks on a boat to the Arab Trägers, three piasters an

hour, which was money then. Eight hours work was 24 piasters a day in those days the dollar was four pounds. So it was money, you know? Anyway, it was not a nice job.

There came some friends and told me, "Look as far as we remember, you used to play the piano, why don't you start to play the piano?" Well, meanwhile the War started, the Australians came, the Aussies, a lot of soldiers and so on and I started big, big business there on the seashore, primitive places [coffee shops] but whatever. "Why don't you start to play the piano?" I didn't play [hadn't played] the piano for ten years already. Anyway we asked some friends if I may a little bit practice, but to play the piano and so on, everything is connected with nerves. My nerves were shattered really, I didn't have the nerves to remember what to play, so my wife sat next to me. She was singing, whistling, she always knew those melodies, the American ones, but I couldn't remember them and she started whistling, singing, nu, anyway, I got on my way and offered myself as a pianist. Those Yiddelakh, they were so primitive people, some of them. They knew...I offered myself as a pianist, okay.

I remember there was a Yid [who said,] "Wieviel Bassen spielt Ihr?" ["How many bass buttons (knobs on the left hand side for chords) are on your (accordion)?"] Look, I have to explain it to you. They knew something about the garmoshke [small accordion (concertina)]. Accordions, there are with 60 basses, 80 basses, the big ones with 120 basses, so he heard an accordion with 120 basses and asked me "How many basses are you playing?" [With boldness I said, "I play] all the basses." Anyway, I got my first job. Do you know what it meant in those days...

R: Where was the job? What place was it, a restaurant, a night club?

H: What? A night club? You are dreaming! It was, as we used

to say in Israel, a "bardak." Do you know what a "bardak" is? A body house, whatever. It was a hotel and restaurant [in Tel Aviv], the music, whatever. Anyway, we were playing there from 8:30 in the morning until 11:00 [p.m.] at night time, you know what does it mean? There was an interruption [a break] of one hour at noon. I came home first, my wrists were swollen, I wasn't used to play that much anymore. Anyway, I give you another example. This first place, you know, I was looking for places, and one day I came home and my wife told me to look, "There was somebody asking if the musician Holz was living here [and] I said, "Living here are no musicians" when all of [a] sudden I remembered, you [I] became a musician. Anyway, I went there, well, I wasn't yet fluent in Hebrew you know ... and fine, fine people, Sephardic Jews. "How much do you ask." I knew I could bargain, so I said double of what I expected. Naturally he offered me less, so finally we agreed. Besides we had the soldiers, they were offering us drinks. So we had to ask... [end of Tape 2; Side 1]

Interviewee: Leon Holz (H)

Date of Recording: Aug. 15, 1990

Ident. Number: O3-3

Track Number: T2-S2

Interviewers: Renia Perel (R), & Silviane Feder (S)

H: So we had to ask for this avocado,⁵ whatever, and at the end of the day because we got for every drink they offered for us, they charged him four piasters and we got one piaster for every drink. Anyway at the end of the day there was again bargaining. We asked for twenty drinks, we had twenty. He said, "No, you had only ten," and we agreed on fifteen. but there was one thing, you know, when they started to brawl when they started to fight, those Australians and these and that...

R: What kind of clientele did come in? Soldiers? British and Australian?

H: Only soldiers, mostly Australians, they were excellent clients, the British, when British soldiers came in, they said, "Limeys out, limeys out." But the Australians were fantastic, but you know the older Yiddelakh [waiters] took advantage of them. You know, for instance, they were always in groups of four, five, six boys and they came [after] when they [had been at the front] fighting. Look, I have seen pictures how they were fighting in Greece. When the German paratroopers came down, the Australians, every sixth only had a rifle. Every sixth! Finally when the situation was so desperate there was a Jewish brigade too. So they shouldn't be caught as Jewish boys the Australians gave them their hats and their marks, their "doggy marks" ["dog tags," so that] they [the Jews]

⁵This was actually "egg brandy" - but it was not to be recognized as such - 1/5 egg brandy, 4/5 water.

shouldn't be caught as Jewish by the Germans when they get [became] prisoners of war. Anyway, but the Yiddele lived with them, so for instance there came a group of five, six boys. They were consuming beer, incredible amounts. Okay, so one of them ordered a round [of] beer. Okay? He gave the waiter a bill of five dollars. Now the waiter he was in no hurry to give him the change, meanwhile they drunk it up [the beer]. The next one, "Another round for me." He remembered the first one gave him a pink bill, he gave him again a pink bill. He didn't hurry to bring him the change. That's the way they made money. They made money you can't imagine, you cannot imagine, fabulous. But anyway, so...

R: You're now in 1940, yes?

H: That's 1940, yah, because I tell you then. My wife she started some alteration business. She knew how to do it, anyway, it's tough to make business with Yiddeles, yah? She delivered the alterations to them to pay. [They would say,] "Come tomorrow, come next week, come the week after." Finally, when I got a job as a musician [and] I started to make money. I said "Mimi, out with the alterations, to hell with it." And she started to work in a bridge club. She was a very good bridge player so she started to work in a bridge club. In between - a nice anecdote from the time when I was a musician - we met, she met some people in the street, some acquaintances whatever, and they asked her in Yiddish, she didn't speak Yiddish but anyway, she got along. "Nu, wus tut dier Mann?" ["So, what does your husband do?"] [She replied,] "Min Mann spielt." ["My husband plays."] "Vie spielte?" ["Where does he play?"] "Mit die Hand." ["With the hand," she said.] You know what means "vie"? [The word in Yiddish] means "where," not "how." In German "How [does he play with the hand]" [is] "wie spielte mit die Hand." [In Yiddish, it means "where does he play with the hand?"]

But look this first engagement I had in this hotel. The name of the Hotel was Pulga [on the seashore], it still exists. I've been there a few years ago. I remember I went there. The old man, the owner, now there are his sons there, some Sephardishe Yidden [Sephardic Jews], nice, nice fellows. And I came in, this old man, he was almost completely blind already, he was sitting there and I addressed him [in Hebrew, then Yiddish], "Atah," you, "zocharet ikvah, gedenk mir, no?" "You remember me?" "Betach [certainly] you used to play here for me, you were from Czechoslovakia," [he said,] "you were playing in my place years ago." Fine, fine people. So that's it.

R: He recognized your voice.

H: What else did I do? Oh yah, I remember.

R: If you could sort of wind it up now and bring it...like this is your life, and your struggle and jobs. the period when the War ends. I mean, how did you feel? What do you do? How do you participate? Did you hear about the concentration camps? Did you know that? How did the people react to it? What was happening and that will conclude.⁶

H: I was working as a musician. I had a partner, didn't know about meanwhile [I improved my way of playing], came back

⁶H: The situation in Palestine in 1939 was very difficult. I tried to contact people I knew from Czechoslovakia, without much success. Later, I took an opportunity in the port of Jaffa where I worked as a musician. When the War spread to the shores of North Africa, plenty of military personnel came to Palestine where there were 'leave' camps established. As a consequence, business started to flourish. In the beginning, we did not hear any rumours about concentration camps, but much later there were rumours about labour camps. It started in 1942-43. In summer time, because it gets so hot, we had to keep the windows open. Sometimes we could hear terrible screams. At first, we did not know the reason. There were people who somehow escaped from German prisons or camps, but none of us knew about the concentration camps at that time. After we had been released from Sarafand, I got an offer to join the British police force (based on my training in the Czech army), 6 pounds a month. Taking the advice from our friend in Tel Aviv, I refused. When the German armies advanced on Egypt, many Arabs were already walking through the streets of Tel Aviv choosing which buildings they would annex if the Germans would enter Palestine. The situation was not pleasant. We were trained in sabotage.

and I was playing in really nice places and I remember the War ended I was playing in a nice Cafe Zabor there on Ben Yehuda Street.

I had a partner a Polish fellow and sure I started to inquire, I told you there were certain centres for Polish Jews for Hungarian Jews, Austrian Jews, Czechoslovakian Jews and so on, and one day I discovered the name of my parents on the list of survivors. You can imagine how happy I was. You know I knew during the War already that my parents had to move out from our house. The Jews in Prossnitz were concentrated outside of the city. They had to live four or five families in one room and then they were transported to Theresienstadt. In Theresienstadt I even got a letter yet before they were deported and my mother wrote, "I know we have to move, but I don't mind as long as I am together with your father." You know, my father before already, I knew that he, when the Germans came in, when the German army came they were very polite. You know my father was the president of the Jewish community in Prossnitz for quite a number of years and I know when the German officers came to pick up my father he should let them into the offices of the Jewish community so they were very polite. They even told him, "Mr. Holz, first go you, after you," they were most polite. Then there were six or seven of the leading Jews in Prossnitz they were detained in the local jail. He was still happy go lucky and he was among them. Later, there was another story when he was imprisoned and was taken in some lumber yard he had to carry lumber or whatever, this story I know it from my uncle. I never asked, I didn't want to provoke answers. I never asked about sufferings. If people told me I was listening but I was never asking, you know. Then they were deported to Theresienstadt, Terezin, and finally ... No, before, my father was six months in Buchenwald and again was released. And then they were transported from

Theresienstadt to Auschwitz. My father passed away on the transport from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz and was just thrown out from the wagon. My mother went into the gas chamber on August 6th, 1944. You know, as a consequence, I know only the date my mother perished. I keep the yahrzeit for both of them on the 6th of August 1944. It was the 4th day of Av. You ask me how do I know. I know from another lady from our home town who was with her till the last day when she went into the gas chamber. That's it. So you know, when I read the notice that my parents survived you can imagine how happy I was.

Then someday I just went to work, I got a cable from my brother-in-law who was living in Stockholm in Sweden. I still remember the words, "Joseph and Elsa Holz, Birkenau," was near Auschwitz where Jews were burnedvery little hope.

Your know, I like to have a drink now and then, not only now and then, I'm having a drink every day. At the beginning Annie [Riebenfeld] was objecting but finally she convinced herself I'm not a drunkard but I like to have my happy hour. I like to have a drink, maybe even two. But I never in my life was drunk. That night, look, I couldn't say I'm not coming to work, because if I wouldn't have shown up, my partner would have been without parnosse [livelihood], so I had to show up, I had to play. I was playing the piano, and, from time to time, the accordion. There was dancing. I had just one single purpose, I wanted to get drunk, to be without feeling, a hopeless thing. I consumed so many drinks, so many scotches that when I stood up from the piano and grabbed the accordion I had to lean on the piano to keep straight but I was completely clear. I couldn't get drunk, you know.

Anyway, after the War we came back. I went back to

Czechoslovakia in September, 1946. My brother...

S: What about your in-laws?

H: No, meanwhile I got divorced. I was divorced in Israel. We didn't have kids and we divorced in Israel. So I came back single. My brother came back, he was with the Czech army in England, because we were harbouring illusions, dreams to get something back or whatever; we had two houses. Anyway we didn't get anything back, so whatever. There was one thing I remember, I agreed with my brother. Well, I met an uncle of mine that survived it in Theresienstadt, the brother of my late mother, and they were Prossnitz and when I came back my brother came back first, he was still in uniform, an officer of the Czech army and we knew that my mother, had before they were deported, she gave a few jewels to a former "shiksa" [non-Jewish woman], a shiksa who was in our house for sixteen years until she married. So my brother went over there, big thing there, "You survived!" Okay, then he asked her "Tell me, what about the jewelry my mother handed over to you?" [She replied,] "Oh, we had to give it to the Germans." You know, I asked my brother because in those days it was shortly after the War, whoever was outside of Czechoslovakia was right, whoever was inside was suspicious [under suspicion] of collaboration with the Germans. And I asked my brother why didn't you draw your gun, "Where are the jewels? She would have produced it." My brother gave me a very good answer, which I accepted. He said, "Look, first of all I was happy that I sold the gun for 5,000 American cigarettes. Secondly, we lost more than the jewelry." He was right, to hell with it.

The third story, when I came back to Czechoslovakia... you found very few people. When you were walking in Prague, for instance, along the main square - do you know Prague by any chance? - Along the main square at 7:00 o'clock at night time your steps were giving the echo [because]

nobody was there; there was nobody in the whole square. In the daytime when you met some people former acquaintances, whatever, and then it started, "What became of this, what became of that?"

S: Are you talking of all people or Jews?

H: Jews. In 1946. "What about this and this fellow?" Gone, gone, gone.⁷

R: And you are in Prague now not in Prossnitz?

H: In Prague. To Prossnitz I went only to visit my uncle.

R: And you mean the Prague community, the 350,000 Jews that lived once there, all was gone and vanished.

H: There is in Prague in the Pinkas Synagogue, is a memorial of most of Czech Jews which perished. Look, I have pictures from Jewish synagogues in Prague. A goy [non-Jew] sent it to me, a goy who went his mother's living and time and again and he from Vancouver went to Czechoslovakia and he brought me those pictures and he mailed [me] a few of them. That's why I'm going to Czechoslovakia [soon]. Prague is a very notable, outstanding place from the point [of view] of Jewish culture. Don't forget Prague's Jewish culture starts in the 11th and 12th century.

R: Oh yes, I have books and stories of there.

H: Listen, a niece of Annie [Riebenfeld] is working voluntarily in Tel Aviv in [some neighbourhood,] and there was a few months ago the Czech president, Vaclav Haval, there in Israel.

R: One of our [Organization's] vice-presidents was there at this gathering because five people from Vancouver went to this gathering of the Czechoslovak Jews and Dr. Helen Karsai was present.

⁷H: When I came back to Czechoslovakia in 1946, I have met a few people, new acquaintances, and I was not the only one who was asking the question "Why?".... An old, very pious man told me, "Don't ask questions because there are no answers." I think this was the clearest answer I ever got.

I have just been handed a book. The title is "Where Cultures Meet: The Story of Jews of Czechoslovakia." Oh, what a beautiful book. If we have your permission we would like to borrow it before we write up your story.

H: Yah, but please take care.

R: We won't take it until we need it.

H: Okay, when I come back [from Prague]. I wanted to show you something.

R: I would like you to now complete perhaps how you came to Canada and to describe and talk about your feelings.

H: I went to my home town just for a short visit on weekends to see my uncle. He survived with his two kids, his son-in-law came back with TB and he had a whole year he had to be put...anyway...he survived that and is living today in Israel. My uncle and his wife passed away meanwhile. He was an old, old man. He passed away [when] he was around 90. [They all survived the concentration camps.]

Anyway, so I started some business again. Look, I was lucky, doesn't matter if you put on the word luck or whatever. You know, I was educated and I grew up in a very, let's say, "bechoved" ["nikhbad?" Hebrew for "honourable"] Jewish home, not Orthodox, [but] naturally it was kosher. My grandfather, he was really a dreamer. My father he had a very considerable knowledge of Jewish things, belongings and so on. After all, he was for many, many years the Rosh HaKehilah [Head of the community] and I didn't want to stay in Prossnitz in my home town so I was in Prague and there I had friends and there was a friend of mine who came back to Teplitz-Schönau, that's in the Sudetenland. Teplitz-Schönau is the place where my first wife came from, Teplice-Sanov today. That's the area not far from Karlsbad ["Karlovvy Vary" in Czech] and so on and so on. Anyway, I got an offer to enter as a partner in a business, let's say, the fellow who got the business his parents perished and he took care of the business but he

needed a partner. He needed a partner, let's say, who is familiar with the textile business, it was textile wholesale and retail and then there were [a] precondition that he [the prospective partner] was fluent in Czech, which I am. [Interview stopped. A visitor arrives]... I entered into an established [textile] business. I got a bad smell, I did very well there financially, extremely well, but I got a bad smell that the Pinkies ["Pinkos"] are going to take over.

R: The Communists were coming?

H: Yah, so I went on a short visit to Sweden. I intended at least for a short visit to Sweden to find out what's the best way to transfer some values [valuables] or whatever. Anyway, my intention was to stay in Sweden for a week. But meanwhile on February 18th was the change of the government to take over by the Pinkies ["Pinkos"] in Czechoslovakia and I didn't return anymore.

S: What year was that?

H: 1948. I left on January 28th, and February 18th was the changeover. So I was stranded in Sweden, stranded is exaggerated because you know my late sister was living there, and my brother-in-law, my brother, anyway, but I made up my mind [that] I wanted to get out of Europe. Because, you know, in those days you opened up the newspaper in Sweden, "fifty aircraft, nationality unknown, over flew the north of the country." Everybody knew they were Russians. Because they were already firm grip over Finland. So I made up my mind I want to get out of Europe. I want between the Russians and myself, I want a big, big water. So I went wherever they let me in. There was no country that would let me in with a "pinkie" passport, with a Czech passport [from a Communist country]. Well, anyway, somehow I managed, I got. There was a fine fellow in the Czech Embassy in Stockholm. I got a perfect, waterproof passport and he told me there's only one thing, "With this passport never step on Czech soil or you'll get

some bracelets [handcuffs]." With this passport I immigrated to Chile with 25 dollars in my pocket in 1949. Just a minute. 1946 I came back to Czechoslovakia, 1948 I immigrated to Sweden and 1949, ya, from Sweden I went to Switzerland and got a job in a hotel, then back to Stockholm and then to Chile.

In Chile I got married, two kids were born and after 16 years of marriage my wife passed away. She was sick for five years, cancer, and she passed away. Shortly after I remarried [to] a very nice lady. She was a widow too, and again, as a consequence of the Communist takeover [by Salvador Allende, in 1970], we emigrated to Vancouver.

S: What year was that?

H: [In] 1970 we left Chile and 1971, January, we arrived in Vancouver. In Vancouver my wife became sick and again, after an illness of five years, she passed away. Again we were married for 16 years, an extremely happy marriage, you knew her.⁸

R: I did too, I met her too, and I met your daughter one time in the apartment down in the West End [downtown Vancouver].

H: Shortly after my wife passed away, Benno passed away, Annie [Riebenfeld] and I got together. So I started to say something before, you know, I was raised in a ...
[end of tape]

⁸H: When we came to Vancouver in 1971, I became a sales representative for some companies in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, etc. I started selling very well, but unfortunately, there came the devaluation of the dollar and the business went sour. The Canadian customers did not want to accept any price increases and the European exporters refused to ship at better prices. I was desperate. My wife Liselotte asked me if we had enough money to make ends meet. My answer was positive, but I needed some activity. She said, "Who knows how many years to come we still can enjoy life. Let's enjoy it." So right she was. Shortly afterwards she underwent cancer surgery. After an excellent marriage of 16 years, she passed away. My wife did not work. Her occupation was to keep me happy.

Interviewee: Leon Holz (H)

Date of Recording: Aug. 15, 1990

Ident. Number: 03-3

Track Number: T3-S1

Interviewers: Renia Perel (R), & Silviane Feder (S)

H: [My former wife's name was] Lisselotte. You know what I wanted to point out, just a very short thing, I'm no Orthodox Jew. I'm not going every Saturday to shul. I even didn't put on my tefillin since the bar mitzvah, but I am a believer. Let's say, there was definitely, not always, smooth sailing in my life.

R: When you say you're a believer, you mean you're a believer in God?

H: Yah. That's why before I told you, call it lucky, some people call it luck, some people call it destiny. I don't aspire, I don't take it for my "hokhma" [wisdom] my brain, that let me to make the changes I did as a consequence to avoid being harmed or whatever. Beginning from the fact that from 1938 we started to prepare the exit from Czechoslovakia and Hitler, something was pushing me and that's what I am attributing to divine provision, to divine, call it provision, vision, whatever it is. And again, after all, that I have met Annie [Riebenfeld] who is a wonderful wife and companion with all you to the ways I've been led. You know luckily enough, both of us, Annie and I, have the same Jewish background, we don't take it for granted. Don't forget Annie's getting 78 in a couple of months, I'm pushing for 82. There are a few things which would have been better fifty years ago. We haven't got anymore the elasticity which we needed, let's say Annie [Riebenfeld] was luckier than I was, she didn't go through such mishaps or whatever it was, as I did, but today I haven't got anymore the elasticity and the nerves I had in former days but we are fully aware both of us,

luckily enough, that we are blessed.⁹ That's it.

R: God bless you with many years of happiness with you and Annie and thank you for giving us this story; perhaps others will understand how all this happened to our people.

H: Thank you.

⁹Whether due to work of the 'All mighty' or destiny, I crossed paths with Annie Riebenfeld - an outstanding lady - the jewel of her family. We had years of harmony, understanding and happiness - but only less than seven years.

My message? When in 1938 my brother and I left the home of my parents to join the army, my father said to us: "Be good Jews, be Menschen."