HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

SAUL HORN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Ian A. Spetgang
Date: August 29, 1993

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SH - Saul Horn [interviewee]
IS - Ian A. Spetgang [interviewer]
Date: August 29, 1993

Tape one, side one:

IS: Okay, today is Sunday, August 29. My name is Ian Spetgang, S-P-E-T-G-A-N-G, first name Ian, I-A-N, of Doylestown, Pennsylvania. And I will be interviewing Saul Horn, H-O-R-N, of Fairlawn, New Jersey, who has kindly consented to be interviewed as to his experiences in Europe pre-World War II and during, during the war. So we'll start. And the first question will be please tell us, tell us where you were born and when a little about your family. And you have to hold that. Hold that in your hand.

SH: Yeah. I was born in Łódź, Poland. I had three brothers. We had-- we had about 65 people in our family. My mom had five sisters and three brothers. Łódź was a permanently, a prominently Jewish city with a bursting population of Jews. There was antisemitism of course, but we had very little contact with the gentile population. We did belong to a Jewish organization. One of my brothers served in the army. Fifty-five, fifty-five years ago life in Poland was very primitive.

IS: Excuse me. What, what, when were you born, what year?

SH: I was born in 1913.

IS: 1913. So let's, so about 1940 you were about 27.

SH: I was about 35 years old.

IS: Okay.

SH: Yeah. In Łódź the Jewish population was about 300,000 people. There was a *kehillah* [Jewish community], a *Gemeinde* [Jewish community leaders] and a very, very many organizations of difficult Poland typical...

IS: Pursuits?

SH: …pursuits, yeah. After the Germans occupied Łódź, we lost our business and our house. We left Łódź on December 1939, after they made Łódź part of the German *Reich*. We had no help from anybody. We wan--went to the township of Glowno, not far from Łódź, but it was outside the so-called German *Reich*. We did not attend any...

IS: Excuse me, how do you spell that town? How did you spell the name of that town?

SH: G-L-O-W-N-E, N-O rather. There was none, we did not attend any synagogues. There was none after the Germans occupied Poland. We did not have any contact with the outside world. From the Glowno Ghetto we left to the Warsaw Ghetto. I was aware of the, of the existence of the underground.

IS: Excuse me, could I just ask you about the Glowno Ghetto? And what did--how--what did your family do there? Did you work there or...

SH: We did not do anything, because part of my two, part of my brothers were left in Łódź.

IS: And your parents, you were with your parents?

SH: I, I was with my parents and my other brother.

IS: What did your parents do there?

SH: We didn't do anything. We stayed in the ghetto. I--we used to go outside and work, you know. The Germans took us outside and we, we, we had some money and we bought ourselves some food beside what we have gotten in the ghetto. They were gave us very, very little.

IS: So, so your father did not have a job that he was paid for?

SH: No, no, no.

IS: So...

SH: Nobody was paid for.

IS: So how would you get food and clothing? I mean how would...

SH: The--there was a *kehillah* like a, a president of the *kehillah* and we were, we were--we are getting that much food every, every week or so. And we had to, you know, to see that we have enough from one week to the other. There was very little food, very little of anything else. And we had nothing to, to heat. It was cold. Start to get fall, you know and winter.

IS: Was there a synagogue in the ghetto there?

SH: No, no, no.

IS: No.

SH: In 1941 the Germans included Glowno into the German...

IS: *Reich*?

SH: Government.

IS: Government.

SH: You know? Then they gave us an order that we have to leave Glowno and go to Warsaw, go east. They did not give us any, any transportation. We had to either walk or, or hire a--those farmers on the horse and buggy, whoever had the money to pay him. Otherwise we somehow had to either walk or whatever anybody can do to go to Warsaw Ghetto. We arrived in the Warsaw Ghetto, and at that time we lived in Warsaw Ghetto in a room maybe with three or four other families. There was little of anything else. They took us to work in the Warsaw, there was a airfield, Okecie.

IS: How do you spell that? How would you spell that?

SH: O-...

IS: Just for the person writing this out.

SH: O-K-E-C-I-E, Okecie. We used to go there by trolley cars every morning and they took us back in, late in the afternoon. And well, whoever had a chance to buy

something outside to bring in to the ghetto, they, they, they tried to bring in. But sometime they stopped these trolley cars at the gates and we had to, to empty everything out because we were afraid that the Germans would kill us if they find anything on, on our bodies, you know? We, we used to, we used to, we used to shove potatoes into our pants in this, you know, and we tied the ends that the, the potatoes should not drop out. But when they start, you know, searching us, we opened the pants and the potatoes dropped out. So in Poland there is no telling what was in the Warsaw Ghetto. What hunger can do to people. I have seen little boys. The hunger starts up, your legs start to swell, and the swelling rises up to your head and your eyes get swollen. Your head gets swollen. The eyes close almost entirely. This is what hunger does to you. I have seen a boy standing on the street and they tried to give him a little piece of bread, and he couldn't take it anymore. He couldn't eat. I have seen three little children, two sisters and a brother, in late November, when the, in Poland it is very, very cold. They were sleeping on the street. And in morning, the, the two sisters on the--were dead, and the little boy in the middle was alive. So he survived by the heat of the two sisters. I have seen children starting to grab pieces of bread from a older person, and they start to beat them. And he just bend down on the, on the ground and start to eat it as fast as he possibly can in order to swallow it before they got it out of him. Now, there is so much to tell. The, the Jewish police and the SS grabbed me once, and I was supposed to be transported in the next day. And they held me on a station on the second floor. In the middle of the night, I jumped out of the second floor and I ran. From Poland, from the Warsaw Ghetto...

IS: Now you ran back to your--this was before you were married? This was when you were, how old were you about when this happened? Or was this before you were married to Marcia or...

SH: I, no, I...

IS: I'm trying to understand the...

SH: My, my wife was Marcia's sister, my first wife, who died in a concentration camp, in 1942 [weeping].

IS: Would you like to take a stop? [tape off, then on]

SH: In 1941, we tried to leave the Warsaw Ghetto, but we couldn't leave unless we have some what they call *Ausweis* [identification card or pass], like a, like a piece of paper that allows us to, to leave the ghetto. But we couldn't, we only had the, the permit to go out, be on the train. But we could not walk the streets of Warsaw because this was outside of the ghetto, and Jews were not allowed outside the ghetto. So we, we had to hire a Polish policeman. And we paid him that he should bring us, walk us like, like prisoners to the train. And then on the train--we were on the train, we left for a other town which was further down east. The town was Opatów, O-P-A-T-U-V [Opatów]. And we stayed there...

IS: Excuse me. [tape off, then on] Okay.

SH: I have to tell you a little bit more about the Warsaw Ghetto what I saw there. It's incredible what people can, can lower themself to, you know, like you become an animal, just an animal. Like a, you know animal in the morning it looks for something to eat? Like people turned themselves into animals. I've seen, I've seen a crippled young boy that was on, on a little, you know, he made a homemade--he was crippled. He couldn't walk. He was on a, on a homemade piece of board with four little wheels. With his hands he pushed himself. He had a black coat on him. It was so many lice on him that the coat was almost white. And he tried to, you know, to, to--he begged. He was a beggar. But he, nobody had anything to give it to him. Now when we came out from the ghetto we traveled to, to Opatów. And Opatów we were about six months or so and they, the SS surrounded Opatów and they caught me to a camp. My wife took a strange baby on her hands and my mother was there when they put me on a truck, on a open truck. And this is the last I saw my mom. And my wife was there too. And they took me to a labor camp by the name of Skarzysko, S-K-A-R-Z-Y-S-K-O. I spoke German very good, and I had no money because they took everything away from us. In the Warsaw Ghetto, as little money we had we had to spend it on whatever food we could get. And my wife was still in, in Opatów.

IS: Excuse me. I'm sorry, Saul, but--[tape off then on]

SH: Where were we?

IS: The--I forget how you spell it, S-K-...

SH: S-K-A-R-Z-Y-S-K-O, Skarzysko.

IS: Okay.

SH: And we were, and we arrived in Skarzysko in 1941. Must have been somewheres around September. And from gentile people who traveled from Skarzys-, from, from Opatów to Skarzysko, I found out that, that, that Opatów is surrounded by SS and they gonna, they gonna take every, every Jew out and they gonna put, put them to the camps and they're gonna gas them. And I spoke pretty good German and there were some Jewish people who had some money and gold. And there were ten guys who gave me some money and I went up to the SS man, the top guy, by the name of Tauber, and I spoke to him in German. And I gave him a list of ten women. And I gave him gold and I gave him money and I says, "Is there by any chance you can, you can go to Opatów and bring those ten women over?" And he put on his, his SS uniform and he took a truck. And he went there, and sure enough he brought all those ten women to Skarzysko. And I had, I, having a German name, Horn, I, I was subscribing to the *Volkischer Beobachter,* a German, a German newspaper which was delivered to me in the factory, not in the camp. And the Germans came over to me every morning and asked me, "What's the news?" And then the Polish people came over and asked me. My wife had a good job, because, and I had a good job, because of the fact that the Germans, you know, came over to me and asked me, you know, what was new, because I had the German paper. They did not. Anyway, in 1942, my wife got sick. She had typhoid. And she was taken to a barracks, a

separate barracks what they called a hospital. Yeah, in Skarzysko we were put 2,000 people together. We slept on those wooden, what's...

IS: Cots? Or...

SH: Yeah.

IS: Or bunks or...

SH: Bunks, on the wooden bunks. It was very cold.

IS: What was eating like there? The--did they have like one, did they--how many times a day did they feed you, were you fed?

SH: They feed us once a day. They give us a little soup with maybe one potato, and a slice of bread that if you throw it against the wall it would stick to it.

IS: And that was it?

SH: Yeah. We start urinating on top of each other because we could not go out to the toilets what were outside. And the Ukrainians wouldn't let us out unless we were naked. And there was snow on the ground and they told us to crawl, instead of walk. So they start urinating on each other. Then in 1942, as I say my wife got sick. And I was the only one who had a doctor coming in from outside the--from, from the town, inside to the camp.

IS: You say you were the only one that they allowed that?

SH: Yeah, because I had, because of the fact that I had with the Germans, you know?

IS: Okay.

SH: So they allowed me, but anyway she died, in 1942. And in 1942 [pause]…

IS: Let me ask you one thing else, just...

SH: …no, no, to 1944 really, from 1942 to 1944 we were in Skarzysko. From there we were taken to Buchenwald, on a cattle train. There, there must have been about 2,000 Jewish people there.

IS: On the train.

SH: Yeah, open, open, open cattle trains. They packed us in like herring. And whoever was a little weak and his knees buckled, he fell down and they stamped on him or, or they threw him outside. After, I don't recall two weeks or three weeks being, being--from being on the train, from Skarzysko to Buchenwald, there were left, there must have been left about 200 people, because the rest died from starvation. We had to throw them out. When we left the ghetto we were full of lice. But when we, when we arrived we were so punctured, our body was so punctured with lice we just grabbed them with the hands and we threw them out. We scraped them off our bodies and we, we just threw them out. I was in Buchenwald for six months. From Buchenwald we went to Theresienstadt, also in a cattle train. And in Theresienstadt we were there for, from January, beg-, yeah, when we came to Buchenwald we had clothes on, regular civilian clothes. They, they took our clothes. It was about 11:00, 12:00 at night. They gave us stripped clothing with wooden shoes and they put it outside. It was in January. We stayed

outside till 3:00 in the morning. We were about a couple of hundred guys and we rubbed each other's, you know, against each other to keep a little warm. But many, many die--you know, fell down from cold. One thing I can tell you, I found out that people are stronger than steel and weaker than a fly. I was, I was in Buchenwald laying with typhoid people next to me on both sides, and they threw them out piles of dead people outside the barracks. And I was as strong as--although I weighed maybe 80 pounds, I was young and strong--I had a good home--and people just--you catch a cold and you die. And here you have all kinds of miseries and you live and you survive. Now from there, as I say we went to Theresienstadt and it was a, like a *Kaserne* [barracks], you know? There were about two-and-a-half thousand [2500] people. The hunger was tremendous. We didn't have nothing to eat. There was a hospital. Theresienstadt was once a, like a, a model, a model camp.

IS: Excuse me, could you spell that name, Theresienstadt?

SH: Theresienstadt. T-H-E-R-E-N-S-T-A-D-T [Theresienstadt].

IS: Thank you.

SH: The, the, the Germans made this like a model camp. When the Blue Cross[1] used to come in and find out how the, the political prisoners, you know, look like, they took them to, to Theresienstadt at one time. But after the, the Germans start to retreat, this was no more model, you know? And Theresienstadt was just as terrible as anything else, hunger terrible. But I, I, me, speaking German, and Czech and Polish, I started carry--there was a hospital about 2- 300 people or more, and they had maybe 16 doctors there, from--also Jewish people who were, you know like, like us, prisoners. But they were assigned to the hospital. And I start carrying, carrying food to the hospital. And this way I started to grow in statue[2] because I spoke a few languages. And they made me a head of the hospital. And in the hospital the--it was terrible. It was just a hospital in name only, because there was no really any, any medications. They didn't have none. But they call it a hospital. In mine paper you'll find some more specifics, like, like what happened in Glowno, the circumstances we are--we found ourselves in, that we were desperate. We were, we were, we had no--we could not fight because we didn't have nothing to fight with. We were put in circumstances, like, like wherever they told us to go we had to go. In the township of Glowno, just to give you--when they told us to leave--we lived on--Glowno was like a, outside, the ghetto, Glowno was like outside the township of Glowno. And was like trees, you know? And there was bungalows. And people used to come there for the summer months because it was like, you know, like a forest. And people used to come there for the summer months. So they, they surrounded the ghetto with barbed wire,

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[1]It appears that the interviewee meant to say "Red Cross."

[2]It appears that the interviewee meant to say, "stature."

and we were there. When the, the order came to leave Glowno, everybody had to walk out. Across the street from us was a family with three little children. And they had a blind father confined to bed. And as the order came, it says at a certain date we have to leave. Whoever they find they're gonna kill. And so I will never forget that sight when those, that family walked up with the three little kids, running from about two years to seven. Everybody had a, a knapsack on their back and they're walking out, and they left the old man laying in bed. They covered him with the *tallis* and the old man [unclear], "*Lozt mich nisht iber*! *Kinder! Lozt mich nisht hinter!* Children! Don't leave me behind!" And they walked away. And his voice will ring in my ear for the rest of my life. And that voice, that we carried that echo for ages, you know, without a stop. And I will hear that as long as I will live. This maybe will describe a little bit the circumstance we--that they had to leave their father there. Because what are they gonna do with him? They couldn't carry him. He couldn't walk. He was blind. And in 19--going back to Theresienstadt, in May of 1945 the Russian came in and they liberated us. To tell you the stories, the young guys, the people started running out from that, those--they start to look for something to eat. And they start running out and they, they brought in some, some food and they, they locked themself in the, in the rooms because they were still afraid the Germans might come back. And they start feeding themselves, you know, feeding this. And they died for overeating, you know? They had empty stomachs. And they died like flies from overeating. And, and some of the guys found the German soldiers and start beating them up. But I happened to be the one guy who, you know, who, who said to myself, "I might beat up the wrong guy. He might be only a soldier who took orders, you know?" And, a little after that, when I was the head of the hospital, the Russian woman, a Captain, came in and told me I have to stay here until the hospital is gonna be dissolved, you know? And my, my wife's sisters, Marcia, Dora, and Anna, they were liberated in Czechoslovakia about a mile where I was delivered, from Theresienstadt. And they walked to Theresienstadt because they, they heard there was a Jewish camp. And they came into Theresienstadt and they found Jewish guys walking the street already. So they, they ask about me, and they told them, "Oh, Saul Horn is a big *Chipteh* [phonetic] in the hospital." So they came over. And you know, and...

IS: What was it you did in the hospital? What was your duties or your...

SH: I, just, you know, they had to assign the doctors when to come and when to go, you know, and all that. So I was the one. And...

IS: So they came over, they heard you were there.

SH: Yeah, they came over and I saw them all three of them. And I took them in, you know, from the--I opened the main gate and I let them in. And at night I went--we went all outside. We, we took a train and, which left from Czechoslovakia to Poland. We want to go back to Łódź and see if anybody is alive. But the amazing thing is about the human being, which it still amazes me to this day, is that I know before the war if somebody of your family died, they, they tore their hair out. And here, you know, you're

gonna come out, you wouldn't find anybody. And you have nothing, no family, no money, no home. What are you gonna happen to you? How is, how is your psychology gonna work? How is your mind gonna work? Are you turned into a, a psycho or a criminal or whatever? And yet life is stronger than anything else. We survived. And I came back to Łódź. We were looking for somebody. I walked into a hou--my home where we used to live for forty-some odd years. I knocked at the door and a Polish woman opened the door for me. And I walked in and I just looked around. And the woman asked me, "What do you want to do?" I says, I choked up with tears, and I said, "I don't want to do anything. I just want to look around for a while," and walked out. Well, listen, as I said, I can talk to you for 24 hours. Unless you were there, unless you were—it's uncomprehensible what, what a German nation, the most cultured nation in the world at the time, a nation who gave us Beethoven and Brahms and Bach and Engels and Karl Marx could do such a things. And in Skarzysko a man of maybe, a SS man maybe of 65 years old, he saw two guys, you know, have a little argument over a little soup. He went behind one and shot him right in the head. A gray-haired man maybe in his late 60's! Could you understand? And to this day, when I see one of those what I call a do-gooders who cuddle a cat and who, who pet a dog, and I have seen it, that they walked into a room where they told everybody to leave the town. And they walked up to a crib where a family left a baby maybe three, three months old, and three soldiers wondered in German, because I went with them to help them clean, you know, whatever, and they wonder how what a beautiful baby it is. And one take out a gun and *pop! pop!* Could you imagine that? Could you comprehend that? Now we saw this every day. We saw this every day. And when I, when we went home with my wife's three sisters, we were in Poland, I married one of the sisters, the older sister. And July of 1946, no '45, I establish a business, a manufacturing business in Poland. And the Communists came in at that time. And they did not, they did not do you any harm, but if you had a business they just put some, some taxes on you that you couldn't proceed, you know, you couldn't stay in business. So I told my family...

IS: And you were where?

SH: We were all together at that time.

IS: Still in...

SH: Huh?

IS: Still in...

SH: Telling them that we're gonna leave, I want to leave Poland. I want to go back to Germany.

IS: So what was the name of the place where this was?

SH: Łódź, in Łódź.

IS: Still in Łódź, okay.

SH: Yeah. And to tell you the long stories, you know, I had about a half a million *złotys* of the Polish currency, and I, I bought some dollars on the black market. I

had $80 of a half a million Polish *złotys*! We had--they did not allow us to leave Poland. We had to smuggle. So there was a Jewish--the Jewish *Haganah* started to work at that time. And they gathered everybody who wanted to come out of Poland. They were from the *Haganah*. They smuggled us out in trucks. But we had to, to walk through the Carpaths in Czechoslovakia, the Carpaths, you know...

IS: The mountains?

SH: The mountains.

IS: Yes. Carpathians you mean?

SH: Yeah.

IS: Yeah.

SH: We had to walk the mountains through the night, you know, carry whatever bones we had. All night we walked through the mountains, till we came to Augsburg, Austria[3].

IS: How many days when you left Łódź till this place [unclear]?

SH: We stayed on a border for a few days because till the *Haganah* ordered the trucks and all that, because they were--everybody was going. So they had to organize it. We had to wait our turn, you know? So one night they wak--walked in with trucks, go in trucks. And the, the, the border guard was all bought up, you know?

IS: 1945?

SH: It was in 1946.

IS: '46. Was your daughter born yet?

SH: My daughter was not born yet.

IS: No, she was born...

SH: No, my daughter was born...

IS: In '48.

SH: In seven, in '47.

IS: '47, okay.

SH: Yeah. So, but we had to walk through the Carpaths and go in through Austria. We slept in one of the places on the floors there, till they transported us to Germany.

IS: How long did it take you to get through the mountains?

SH: Oh...

IS: Days?

SH: About, we were total maybe three days till they brought us to Germany, to a DP camp. In a DP camp called Schlupfing.

IS: And could you spell that, please?

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[3] Augsburg is located in Germany.

SH: S-C-H-L-U-P-F-I-N-G, Schlupfing. And they organized a new DP camp there. And we were there for about a--'46 till about, then we went, Schlupfing liquidated in about '48. From there I went to Landsberg, another DP camp, L-A-N-D-S-B-E-R-G. My daughter was born in 1947 in Augsburg, Germany. And in 1949 we arrived in the United States in June. I was, I was, I supposed to be a engineer, a textile engineer. I finished a technical school in Poland, and I supposed to go--the only textile engineering school was in Czechoslovakia. In 1938, Hitler walked into Czechoslovakia and I couldn't go there anymore. I came to the United States without a really, without a trade. And my daughter was two years old. We came to Patterson. We, we didn't have no roof over our heads. My daughter had a abscess under her arm. I didn't even know how to get to the hospital. So we found a Jewish woman in Patterson who took us there, and we lived on the--my wife worked first shift and I worked second shift. We had to leave Edith for two hours with somebody else. And little by little--never went to school for one single day in the United States, never--I learned to speak from, from papers, from magazines. I compared the picture with the words and this way how to, I learned to speak. We lived in a rooming house with five, six parties, toilet in the hall we shared. Cockroaches by the millions. Took us six weeks to clean them out. We had, we had a ice box, every day we had to buy ice for quarter. And till we start little by little saving and I start, I became a businessman. And this is--but you know as I repeat again and again, there is no words, no description, no pictures, no anything else unless you were there, you know? Unless you--you know, what people could do, what human can do to humans is unbelievable. Unbelievable, you know? We were on the wagons going from, from Buchenwald to Theresienstadt. The Germans peeled potatoes and they cooked them. And we tried to picked up the peels, they wouldn't let us pick up the peels.

IS: I'm gonna stop here because I want to just say [unclear]. This will be the end of side one of the tape, and we will continue on side two at a future time.

[Tape one, side one ended. Interview ended.]