

Interviewee:	<u>MERMELSTEIN</u> , Louie	Date:	May 1, 1984
Interviewer:	Rebecca Korntreger		
Audio tapes:	2 English	Transcript:	1 vol. (unpaged) English
Restrictions:	None		

SUMMARY

Louie Mermelstein, the second oldest of 13 children, was born May 12, 1927 in Klascanovo¹, Czechoslovakia, near Munkács. His father was a kosher butcher. He describes good relations between Jews and non-Jews before the war. Louie details changes during the Hungarian occupation in 1940: his father's deportation to a slave labor camp, restrictions against the Jews, having to wear yellow star, and clandestine slaughtering and delivering of kosher meat to make a living.

Louie describes fleeing from a round-up in 1944. He hid in the forest about four weeks with two uncles. During this time he found out that the Jews were forced to a brick factory in the Munkács Ghetto and deported to concentration camps and Auschwitz among them most of his family. Louie mentions help by Gentiles who brought him food while in hiding. A gentile friend also gave him his nephew's identity papers. Louie traveled to Uzhgorod with these false papers, went to the step-sister who helped him settle there with a job, and lived in their house. After some time, he returned to the forest to find his uncles and was denounced by a Gentile who knew him. He describes being beaten by police, thrown in jail and that his employer was also brought to jail for hiring a Jew.²

Louie was held in the jail for days and gives a detailed description of how the police rounded up more of the few Jews who were still hiding. Eventually his group of 30 people is deported to a transit camp called Sarvar where they join a group of about 2,000 to be deported to Auschwitz. Louie details his escape from the train in an area that happened to be under the protection of Raoul Wallenberg and how a decent Slovakian farmer and SS officer direct him to the Jewish Committee in Žilina about 13 miles away. He connects with an uncle and his family in Bratislava and secures a job as a plumber's helper. In the fall of 1944, Louie's uncle gathers the 10 family members in an attic hideout above the factory where he works. A middle-aged gentile friend takes over his position as superintendent of the factory and brings them food after dark. They hide there six months, surviving the Allied bombing, and are liberated by the Soviet army May 8, 1945.

After the war, Louie works for the Soviet army. Because he didn't like how they treated the farmers, he went to the American liberated zone (Germany) and started looking for surviving relatives. He describes returning to Munkács, reuniting with his sisters in Neustadt-Holstein, Germany, finding a cousin in the U.S. Army and discovering that his father was killed the week

¹Possibly the town Kliachanovo, also called Chervenovo, part of the Subcarpathian region. Alternate spellings Klyachanovo [Ukr], Kličanovo [Slov] and Klačsonó [Hung].

²Louie explains that after convincing the authorities that he did not know Louie was a Jew, his employer was released.

before liberation in Flossenbürg, Germany. His G.I. cousin's family in Long Island secures them affidavits to emigrate. Louie emigrates to the United States in June 1946.

See interviews with his siblings

Lillian Taus: RG-50.462.0559 and RG-50.462.0560

Shirley Don: RG-50.462.0210

and brother-in-law, Sam Don: RG-50.462.0208 and RG-50.462.0209

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SUBJECT HEADINGS

World War 1939 – 1945 – Personal narratives, Jewish
World War 1939 – 1945 – Deportation from Czechoslovakia
Klascanovo, Czechoslovakia
Munkács, Czechoslovakia
Aid by non-Jews
Aid by S.S.
Hiding – in woods
Identification cards--Forgeries-- Czechoslovakia.
Hiding - passing as an Aryan
Passing (identity)-- Czechoslovakia.
Raoul Wallenberg
Assistance by Jewish Committee – Žilina, Czechoslovakia