

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

**Name of interviewee:** Fixler, Leo & Helen

**Date of interview:** 8/21/1990

**Summary:** Leo Fixler was born in Teresva, Czechoslovakia in 1922. He grew up in a very large family – he had 8 siblings and 8 half-siblings. He recalls having a happy childhood until 1939, when the Hungarians invaded Czechoslovakia. Shortly after the invasion, Leo moved to Budapest, where he hoped to work and lead a better life. After settling down and living successfully for a few years, in 1943 Leo was sent to Germany and placed in a forced labor camp. He was in this camp until the beginning of 1945.

Early in 1945, Leo was forced on a death march to the Mauthausen concentration camp. He remained there for about 3 weeks with no food or water. This camp also had many crematoria. From there he was sent to Gunskirchen camp. This camp was better than the last, and Leo was liberated shortly after he arrived. After the liberation, Leo and his brother attempted to travel home to Czechoslovakia. As a result of the continued fighting, Leo and his brother were able to stay with a family near the border. After being fed too much too quickly, Leo and his brother ended up in the hospital and also contracted a serious case of typhus. After six months of hospitalization the Red Cross was able to arrange for their return to Czechoslovakia.

After recovering, Leo traveled back to Germany, where he joined the U.S. Army in the Labor Supervision Program. In 1949 he immigrated to Winnipeg, Canada, where he worked as a tailor and later met his wife Helen.

Helen Fixler was born in 1927 in a medium sized city in eastern Poland. She grew up in an Orthodox home and had four siblings. She remembers having a happy childhood until 1941, when the Germans invaded Poland. Suddenly, she could no longer go anywhere, had to wear a yellow star and food was rationed. Shortly after the invasion, all of the Jews in her town were placed in a ghetto. The ghetto consisted of only two streets, often 5-10 families were sharing one house.

Rumors began circulating that the Germans were planning on killing everyone in the ghetto. Feeling desperate, Helen's father planned for the family to escape at night. Helen's entire family crawled out of the ghetto one night with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They hid in the nearby woods, along with as many as 16 other families. They dug large bunkers in the ground and covered themselves with plants. Helen lived in the woods for a year and a half. Part of this time was in the extreme winter, when the temperature dropped to  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Even today, Helen wonders how she survived that period in her life.

When Helen was liberated she couldn't believe that she had survived. She was

## **Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project**

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

only 16 or 17, but had already lost her mother, a brother and a sister. She returned shortly to her childhood home in Poland, but soon moved to Germany with her brother, as that was the only way to move to the United States or Israel. Her brother immigrated to Canada and sent papers for her to join him one year later. She moved to Winnipeg, Canada. This was a hard move for her to adjust to, because she spoke no English. She met Leo there and they were married.