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INTERVIEW WITH: David Eisenberg. #36  
INTERVIEWER: Not given.  
DATE: Not given.  
PLACE: Not given.  
TRANSCRIBER: Nancy J. Campbell, Fort Dodge, Iowa 50501

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Hillcrest, Beverly Hills, California, 90210. David,  
you said that you're not exactly a Generation to  
Generation person, and you are not exactly a holocaust  
survivor. Could you-- Could you please explain what you  
mean by the--

A. I was born in 1941 in Lublin, Poland, at a time  
when there was a ghetto there. And after living for  
several months with the remnants of my family, I wound up  
in a Catholic orphanage for the rest of the war while my  
parents went through various concentration camps. And as  
a result, I carry with me not only the effects of being a  
youngster growing up as a child of the Holocaust  
survivors, but I carry my own memories because of the  
peculiar circumstances of where and when I was born. So  
I really don't fit into any pattern. This has been  
something that's been following me for years and years  
since--since growing up within the Holocaust atmosphere.

1           Q.    So your experiences have been recorded before,  
2           not by me, particularly; but it's very rare. And we are  
3           very anxious to find out as much as as possible about it.  
4           How old were you when you got to the orphanage, and how  
5           did you get there?

6           A.    Well, my parents tried to save themselves and to  
7           save me for as long as was possible. And apparently  
8           sometime in the latter part of 1941 or the very early  
9           part of 1942--it was in that winter--the time came when  
10          they could no longer save themselves and me. And so they  
11          gave all their valuables to a Polish lady that had worked  
12          for them in the house some of the time and asked the lady  
13          to take me and gave her all of their valuables and asked  
14          her to take care of me; and if they never returned, to  
15          just raise me. And apparently as soon as they were taken  
16          away by the Nazis, this lady threw me out in the street  
17          and--

18          Q.    How old were you then?

19          A.    I was somewhere around six, seven, eight months.  
20          And I was in the snow, and the local police found me  
21          bundled up in the snow. And they turned me over to  
22          whatever section of the police was in charge of these  
23          things. And I eventually wound up in a Catholic  
24          orphanage in Lublin for the remainder of the war.

25          Q.    What do you remember of that period? You were

1 so tiny. You couldn't possibly remember too much, could  
2 you?

3 A. Well, the only remembrances that I have is a  
4 visual idea of what the orphanage and the grounds looked  
5 like. And I remember having to cross a very large  
6 interior patio or interior courtyard from where the  
7 sleeping and eating area was to the church. And I  
8 remember we all had to just kneel down and cross  
9 ourselves before we entered the church. And I remember a  
10 little bit of the--of the layout of the area where we ate.  
11 And I have a visual recollection of one or two of the  
12 meals in a little pewter or aluminum mug of some kind.  
13 It was a very dark liquid--a watery dark liquid--and a  
14 piece of crusty bread, and that was our meal.

15 Q. Where was this? In Lublin?

16 A. This was in Lublin. My mother didn't know that,  
17 but-- And after the war, she spent--

18 Q. You found your mother?

19 A. I didn't find my mother. My mother found me.

20 Q. I would like to go in order. Could you tell me,  
21 how old were you when the war ended?

22 A. I was about four years old.

23 Q. About four. And in the meantime, your mother  
24 and father were off; and she came back, looking for you?

25 A. Yes. Miraculously, they both survived.

1 Q. (Interrupts.) Would you tell me in your own  
2 words what proceeded?

3 A. Well, they started checking around to see where  
4 I might have gone. They checked with the family of the  
5 lady that they left me with, and the only information  
6 that they got was information that something had happened  
7 to me and I was very ill and that she turned me over to  
8 the local authorities. They didn't know whether to  
9 believe that or not. And for a very long period of time,  
10 my mother went around to various places all around that  
11 part of Poland, looking for places where I might have  
12 wound up in. It was very much like the famous movie that  
13 was made with Montgomery Clift called "The Search." I  
14 don't know if you've ever seen that movie, but it's one  
15 that I videotaped because I identified very closely with  
16 that movie.

17 Q. Right.

18 A. And it was miraculous. I guess everybody's  
19 story is miraculous in some way, but I feel especially  
20 fortunate because it was miraculous for a variety of  
21 reasons. My father's story combined with my story really  
22 makes it one in a billion, not one in a million, because  
23 he miraculously escaped several camps, one of which  
24 resulted in him being shot through the head and through  
25 the brain; and after being unconscious for a few days, he

1 survived and crawled out of a mass of a few hundred or a  
2 few thousand dead bodies over and above him and crawled  
3 to safety and--

4 Q. A mass grave-- It was a mass grave?

5 A. Yeah. It was another-- There were several  
6 instances where he was just miraculously the only one  
7 that survived.

8 Q. And where did he go from there?

9 A. Well, he was in several places. He was in  
10 Auschwitz and he was in Dachau and he was in Bini-gen.  
11 And my mother was in several concentration camps, also.  
12 And quite miraculously they both survived, and they wound  
13 up going back to Lublin after they were liberated.

14 Q. Looking for you?

15 A. Well, they looked for the remnants of the family,  
16 but that's where my father's family was from and that's  
17 where my mother was--was from, close by, anyway, from  
18 Bill-go-lie. And they found themselves there and then  
19 they started looking around. They started looking around  
20 for me. And it was quite by accident that after looking  
21 around in many distance places, my mother wound up just  
22 by happenstance going into the--the orphanage that was  
23 virtually almost around the corner from where they were  
24 all this time. And they found me.

25 Q. How did she identify you?

1 A. She just--

2 Q. By resemblance?

3 A. She just put a lot of things together.

4 Q. Age?

5 A. Yeah. I don't think it was by resemblance,  
6 because by that time I was like a swollen--the swollen  
7 stomach and virtually no hair because of, you know,  
8 lice--

9 Q. Malnutrition.

10 A. --and disease and everything. So it was just a  
11 combination of things. I sometimes wonder, jokingly, if  
12 she ever really found her son. But there's too many  
13 things. Obviously, she did.

14 Q. Did the orphanage cooperate with her?

15 A. Yeah. There's nothing that I recall from any of  
16 the family histories that would give me any idea that  
17 they didn't. I have no information one way or another.  
18 I mean, it was basically a simple process.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. And from there we went to Stuttgart, and we  
21 lived there until we came to the United States.

22 Q. Did you remember how felt when you met your  
23 mother for the first--saw your mother for the first time?

24 A. I have absolutely no memory, I'm sorry to say.

25 Q. Did-- The effect of the orphanage affected you,

1 I mean, in terms of, well, let's say, did you acquire any  
2 Catholic religious habits--prayer, simple prayer?

3 A. I doubt that. I know that for the first few  
4 months when my mother brought me out of there, she  
5 recounts a story that every time I was afraid or every  
6 time I passed a church, I would cross myself, but  
7 eventually I guess that--that left me.

8 Q. It left you. Did your parents sem any  
9 different--

10 A. (Interrupts.) I have no terrible urge to go to  
11 the Vatican, if that's what you mean.

12 Q. No, not at all. I didn't mean that at all. I  
13 just wondered whether they tried to convert you in any  
14 way.

15 A. I have no real recollection of that.

16 Q. But they were very good to you, too; give you a  
17 home?

18 A. Yeah, I guess so. I remember being beaten once  
19 by a bunch of boys. Whether they discovered I was Jewish  
20 or not or for other reasons, I really have no way of  
21 knowing.

22 Q. Yes. Well, your story is so different from--from  
23 anyone else I've interviewed. I hate to say the word  
24 "refreshing," but it is to me. What can I tell you? I'd  
25 like to find out from you, for the sake of science,

1 really, did you find your parents different from anybody  
2 else, or were you just very young yet and didn't notice  
3 things like that too much?

4 A. What period of time are you referring to?

5 Q. Okay. After-- As you were growing up, you  
6 probably--you were very young; and as you were growing up  
7 you probably Americanized much faster than children who  
8 came abroad--who came here from abroad, rather. I mean,  
9 did you find anything different about your parents from  
10 other parents, other American children's parents, for  
11 example, compared to--

12 A. Well, I have to qualify that.

13 Q. All right. Please do.

14 A. First of all, my upbringing was within a very  
15 confined area of society, that is, Jewish society.

16 Q. In Los Angeles?

17 A. In Los Angeles. My recollection of the five  
18 years we spent in Stuttgart, Germany, is also limited.  
19 It was just, you know, the boyhood years from age four to  
20 age eight and a half. And, you know, there's not really  
21 much going on that stays with you the rest of your life  
22 during those kind of years. But in Los Angeles, the  
23 first few years I grew up in east Los Angeles in an area  
24 called Boyle Heights, which was a very European Jewish  
25 neighborhood until it went to pot and just everybody

1 moved to the west side of town. And so my exposure to  
2 America really was very limited. I went to Heder. I  
3 went to a very poor(?) Jewish school until the seventh  
4 and the eighth grade. And only then did I start my  
5 secular studies. I saw friends who were kids of the same  
6 type of background, basically; and although they weren't  
7 my age, it was very limited. They were kids who were  
8 very Jewish and basically orthodox. They weren't  
9 survivors from the Holocaust. I always felt sort of  
10 unique in that respect because I never was able to  
11 directly identify with anybody exactly with my  
12 experiences.

13 Q. And you never will.

14 A. It's just very rare, I know. I'm aware of that.  
15 And when I run into people here who know my parents and  
16 they look at me, they immediately remember me from  
17 Germany as being the little la-veet-ga that day that  
18 everybody wrote up about. And I happened to have had a  
19 good voice, and I was on the radio, and I was in the  
20 Jewish theater. And people always referred to me as the  
21 wunderkind because it was an unusual, unusual story that  
22 I not only survived, but I survived, fortunately, with my  
23 parents.

24 So you know, the upbringing was always basically,  
25 you know, a very Jewish upbringing with other people who

1 had similar stories. And if it wasn't exactly like my  
2 own personal story, at least it was like my parents'  
3 story because everybody had different stories. Maybe  
4 they weren't shot in the face. Maybe they were shot in  
5 the leg. Maybe they didn't come from Poland, but they  
6 came out of the horst in the Ukraine. And so it was just  
7 part of my upbringing. My mother was a very nice easy-  
8 going woman. My father was always nervewracked because  
9 of the head injury that he received, but they were able  
10 to have a very nice and normal upbringing. And--

11 Q. Did you have any-- Did your parents have any  
12 other children after the Holocaust?

13 A. Yes, I have a younger sister. She was born in  
14 Stuttgart just as we were leaving Stuttgart to go to  
15 Ble-men-hofen to come to the United States.

16 Q. The way I figure, you must have been about 11  
17 when you came here?

18 A. No, I was eight and a half.

19 Q. Eight and a half when you came here? Okay. But  
20 you lived five years in--

21 A. Yeah, five years. I was about four, four and a  
22 half.

23 Q. I see, that's where my mistake.

24 A. I lived about four and a half years, five years,  
25 in Germany, so we came in 1949.

1 Q. And you became Bar Mitzvahed?

2 A. Here in Boyle Heights.

3 Q. In Boyle Heights.

4 A. My son just became Bar Mitzvahed a couple weeks  
5 ago.

6 Q. Did your parents have nightmares?

7 A. Oh, yeah.

8 Q. They talk about the Holocaust?

9 A. I think they were able to control themselves  
10 outwardly as much as possible, but they--they were always  
11 very much affected by any specials on TV or any  
12 particular piece of news that came along, such as the  
13 Eichmann trial or some other popularly-known thing. And  
14 it was always a very difficult subject. My father is  
15 very emotional. So is my mother.

16 Q. Are they here?

17 A. Yes, they are.

18 Q. They are here?

19 A. Yes, and so is my sister.

20 Q. I would like to interview them.

21 A. I will try to arrange it.

22 Q. If you could arrange it maybe tomorrow, if not  
23 today, but I would like to see them.

24 A. We may or may not come here tomorrow.

25 Q. I would like to very much talk to them.

1           A.    I will try.

2           Q.    This is really a remarkable story. Tell me,  
3 what sort of meaning does the State of Israel have for  
4 you?

5           A.    Well, you hit home with that, because I feel  
6 that really the State of Israel was--it's the Statue of  
7 Liberty for--for the American-Jewish people. And--

8           Q.    That's a nice way to put it.

9           A.    It's really--it's a place that I have gone to a  
10 dozen times. I'm going there in two, three months with  
11 my boys for the first time and hope to get my son  
12 involved in it so that the next year he can go for a  
13 summer, and then the following year he can start going to  
14 school there, because I eventually want to move there. I  
15 speak the language fluently.

16          Q.    I gather you've been there--

17          A.    I've been there for, yeah, for a lot of visits.  
18 And I feel very close to the State of Israel, and I--I  
19 surround myself with Israeli friends and Israeli  
20 functions. And I really--I feel American, and yet I feel  
21 that there is another half of me. It's like I'm in a  
22 twilight kind of life--sometimes this way, sometimes that  
23 way.

24          Q.    That's the way it was from the beginning for you.

25          A.    Yes, that's true.

1 Q. Tell me, may I ask what do you do?

2 A. Yes. I'm an attorney in Beverly Hills,  
3 California; and I have been for 16, 17 years. I married--  
4 rather, remarried. I have two children from a former  
5 marriage, the oldest which was Bar Mitzvahed a couple  
6 weeks ago.

7 Q. Musseltoff.

8 A. Thank you. And I have two young babies, age one  
9 and a half and a half from the new marriage.

10 Q. That's beautiful. Well, the Bible says, "Be  
11 fruitful and multiply." The million and a half children  
12 that we lost in the camp have to be replenished. You  
13 were very lucky not to be among them.

14 A. That's true.

15 Q. And it turned out to be just beautiful. I hope  
16 that you'll been able to find your parents. I would very  
17 much like to tape them.

18 A. Well, I'll find them this evening, but I don't  
19 know if we're coming back tomorrow. We may or may not.

20 Q. How about this afternoon?

21 A. This afternoon, no. They are going to the  
22 Cultural-- They are at the Cultural Center now, and this  
23 evening I think we have other plans. But if they are-- My  
24 father is very much involved in these kind of things. He  
25 is the head of the Lubliner Society in the West Coast

1 area, you know, all the people from Lublin that survived.

2 Q. Yes. A sizable group from there.

3 A. Yeah, there are. And he has been enjoying  
4 himself here, looking for familiar faces that are from  
5 his home town or from some of the various camps that he's  
6 been in.

7 Q. I thank you so much for this interview, David.  
8 Let me get on the end of this tape, mention that this is  
9 the tape of David Eisenberg, 520 Hillcrest, Beverly Hills,  
10 California, 90210.

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