

Hollander Ernest

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HOLOCAUST MEDIA PROJECT

INTERVIEWS

WITH

ERNEST HOLLANDER
and
ANNA HOLLANDER

*interviewer: Paul Schwartz
Dec 11, 1984*

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INTERVIEW WITH: Ernest Hollander

INTERVIEWER: Name not given (First name is possibly "Claudia")

DATE: None given

PLACE: 4632 Belfast Avenue, Oakland, California 94619

TRANSCRIBER: Julie A. Ward

THE INTERVIEWER: 4632 Belfast Avenue, B-e-l-f-a-s-t, Avenue. His wife, Anna Hollander might add to this, although I would prefer to do it separately. We'll see.

Ernie -- may I call you "Ernie"?

ERNEST HOLLANDER: Yeah, you may call me "Ernie".

THE INTERVIEWER: What happened to you during the war? You might start when you noticed that something was looming over the Jews.

ERNEST HOLLANDER: Yeah, I would like to go back to the year 1943. I was about 15 years old, and as far as I can remember, the Nazis came over, they took us away, and they put us to a big synagogue where they gathered the Jews from all over the county, because our city, (Czestochowa----) was the county city, and from there, they took us to (Muncash-----), where we stayed six weeks in the (de-go) yard.

THE INTERVIEWER: In 1943 or '44?

ERNEST HOLLANDER: Beginning of '44.

THE INTERVIEWER: '44?

ERNEST HOLLANDER: '44.

THE INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

ERNEST HOLLANDER: And from there, I went to Auschwitz. We went to Auschwitz, eight children, my father and mother, where my mother

1 They made a big ditch--it was still icy snow--and they put all eleven boys,
2 without clothes, in a big ditch, covered them up to their heads, to the neck,
3 with snow, and 32,000 people had to stand in the snow and watch them till
4 they froze to death.

5 So, I was left, and my brother, my youngest brother, that is
6 all that I knew, and --

7 THE INTERVIEWER: Could you repeat where this was, again?

8 ERNEST HOLLANDER: It was in (Allenbush _____), not
9 too far, about 70 kilometers from Brussels.

10 And my brother and I was working, still, in that camp till about
11 March, beginning of March. The Russians came too close, they didn't know
12 what to do with us, they had to run away, and they start to take us on a
13 death march for five days.

14 We left close to 32,000 people on the march. End of the fourth
15 day, we were left 500; the rest of them were killed because they couldn't
16 walk, they were hungry, without clothes, freezing to death. And we arrived to
17 the concentration camp, Flossenbug, and at Camp Flossenbug, America
18 decide to come to close, and they took us, again, for another march, and
19 while we are walking from the concentration camp, a batallion of Americans
20 just came over and liberated us. Unfortunately, 500 people left out of
21 32,000.

22 THE INTERVIEWER: Please tell me, Ernie, how have you
23 been since the war? How do you cope with such memories?

24 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Two things that I think I changed
25 very much in my life: Number one is I came out of the concentration camp
and my parents were very piou, religious people. I think I should tell
that little story.

My mother was a twin sister, the (--inaudible--) just behind me,

1 then, the three sisters, little sisters, three, five and seven years old,
2 probably went straight to the crematoriums.

3 My father, my two older brothers and my younger brother and
4 myself went to near (BRESLOW _____), to a town, (Allenbush _____), where
5 we worked in a factory where they prepared all the things for a railroad
6 station, to build. And we were about 32,000 people in the concentration
7 camp, working for about nine months.

8 After about nine months, my father worked in a sawmill and
9 he prepared ties, the wooden ties for the railroad. And it was very cold,
10 it was in January, he didn't have no gloves, so he found some -- two rags,
11 and he wrapped it around his hands.

12 THE INTERVIEWER: He found some what?

13 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Two rags.

14 THE INTERVIEWER: Rags.

15 ERNEST HOLLANDER: To hold the wood, and -- icy wood just
16 to put in the saw. And one of the rags got loose, it was too close, already,
17 to the saw; the saw dragged in the hand, his left hand, and the rag, and the
18 saw cut off his left hand. Five minutes later, they put him against the
19 wall and they shot him.

20 THE INTERVIEWER: They did?

21 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Yeah. And that was about in January
22 of 1945, and one of my older brothers, going to the -- to work, to the
23 railroad station where we built, some Yugoslavian partisans killed a few
24 Nazis there and they were able to escape. The next day we found them, my
25 very oldest brother, to hang in a tree.

My next older brother was very discouraged about the situation,
and so my father was dead, my older brother was dead, and he tried to run
away with another eleven boys. A couple hours later, they brought them back.

1 my cousins, and their mother died very young, they were very poor. My
2 mother took their seven children, and she had eight of her own, and she
3 raised 15 children, plus we had an uncle who was a teacher, a rabbi in our
4 town, and he was in the house. That means we were about 20 people every day,
5 breakfast, lunch and dinner, that my mother cooked and baked.

6 There was, in our city, in (Czestochowa-----), some people
7 that they used to be well-off, and they, unfortunately, they went bankrupt,
8 or they lost their businesses, or something, and my mother got up Thursday
9 night, the whole night, baking (HALLAS--), and then, the morning, when we
10 were four brothers, we went to (inaudible--), each one had a route, we
11 took to those people a little flour, a little oil, and a few (HALLAS--) they
12 should have for supper because they were ashamed to go and begging.

13 And, unfortunate, she died such a horrible death. So, when we
14 came out of the concentration camp, I just don't believe in God. I said if
15 there would be a God, it would happen maybe to me, or to my younger brother,
16 or to my other relatives, no to pious people like my father and mother.
17 But it didn't took me too long to come back, and I came to Oakland about
18 30 -- close to 30 years ago, and I became very active in the synagogue and
19 organizations. I became president of (--inaudible--) congregation by Jacob
20 and I got involved, very much, in any civic Jewish affairs. I didn't care
21 what it is, as long as it is for the betterment of the Jewish people, to
22 know -- to let know the people what went on, and my goal was to organize a
23 holocaust survival group. Thanks God, we did; very active group. I would
24 like to say that in the last eleven years, the group is in existence, we
25 raised \$300,000, send away to Israel, and I just became a workaholic, you
would call --

THE INTERVIEWER: Yes, a workaholic. I happen to know
that you are very much loved in the community and you do an awful lot, even a

1 lot more than you are -- you say you do.

2 If you will excuse me, Ernie, may I ask you a few pertinent
3 questions that scholars would like to know about you?

4 What experiences, in addition to what you just elicited, stand
5 out in your mind?

6 ERNEST HOLLANDER: I don't get --

7 THE INTERVIEWER: What experiences that were extremely
8 unusual, stand out in your mind most from days in the concentration camp?

9 ERNEST HOLLANDER: I would say that the most that I
10 can remember, we were -- we used to stand a line, four people, and they
11 used to give us a bread to four people.

12 THE INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

13 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Not having a knife, not having a fork
14 or anything to cut with the bread, they just had to break it up in fours.
15 Now, if anybody thinks it was easy, it took sometime a whole day's work to
16 divide that bread, because one guy said, "You have a thickness of a straw
17 more," the other one said maybe "I have a corner and it is not square enough,
18 and it is not wide enough," and I guess the Nazis, they made just animal out
19 of us because we used to kill each other for the piece of bread.

20 I was very, very fortunate that almost until the end, we always
21 had either my father, three brothers, or one of my uncle was, womehow we
22 always managed the family should be four, together, to get a loaf of bread,
23 that we were very fortunate we didn't have to fight. But, I saw that one
24 brother killed, actually killed his brother, for a piece of bread.

25 THE INTERVIEWER: Yes.

ERNEST HOLLANDER: And, I think this is one of the
worst things that I saw in the concentration camp. The Nazis didn't have
to kill us, they made sure that we killed each other.

1 THE INTERVIEWER: They put us in a situation that made it
2 very easy, didn't they? Tell me, Ernie, how did you find out about the
3 gas chambers?

4 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Gas chambers, I really didn't. I
5 never saw the gas chambers because when we came to Auschwitz, they took away
6 the people, the young one, old one. I should mention that my mother didn't
7 want to give up the children. She was only 35 years old, they probably
8 would have taken her to a labor camp or to a concentration camp for work.
9 She had two kids in her arms that she wouldn't give up, so one Nazi came over
10 and hit her over the head. I never knew, after that, what happened to her.
11 But, there were other Polish-Jewish people who helped us get off the trains,
12 and they were telling us that, "See those ovens over there? Those chimneys?
13 That is where they are burning the Jewish people."

14 I never really saw the concentration -- the gas chambers.

15 THE INTERVIEWER: Yes. So -- so, you were there. Have
16 you heard anything about pregnant women?

17 ERNEST HOLLANDER: No. I was only two days in Auschwitz.

18 THE INTERVIEWER: Right.

19 ERNEST HOLLANDER: They took us right away, and I was in
20 a labor camp, it was over close to 35,000 own men, and I never saw a woman
21 or heard from a woman until the last day I was liberated.

22 THE INTERVIEWER: Was there any romance in the camps?

23 ERNEST HOLLANDER: No, no, it was just no time.

24 THE INTERVIEWER: Did you know anyone who knew of any
25 romance going on between --

ERNEST HOLLANDER: I was a young kid, I was only about
15 years old, but I just didn't see that somebody should care for romance.
Either it was something giving to food, or we just didn't care for it. We

1 were busy to get a piece of bread, or maybe steal somewhere a little peels of
2 potatoes.

3 THE INTERVIEWER: So, you did -- did you find that --
4 did your relationship, in any way, change with your family or friends in
5 the ghetto or in the camps?

6 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Yeah. I occasionally visit some people
7 that I was together in the concentration camp, and one good friend is in
8 Los Angeles.

9 THE INTERVIEWER: So, you did develop intimate relation-
10 ships?

11 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Yeah, we are very close. We became,
12 really, almost like brothers.

13 THE INTERVIEWER: Yes.

14 ERNEST HOLLANDER: And no need to tell that with my
15 brother, I came much closer than ever before.

16 THE INTERVIEWER: You do have that one brother, still?

17 ERNEST HOLLANDER: That one brother is alive and lives
18 in (HAYBROOK-----), California.

19 THE INTERVIEWER: Did you take any risks while you were
20 in the camp.

21 ERNEST HOLLANDER: I, personally, not. I didn't took
22 no risks. I guess I was just too young.

23 THE INTERVIEWER: Not that you can recall?

24 ERNEST HOLLANDER: None that I can recall. Only risk
25 I took --

THE INTERVIEWER: Were there any moments of relief?
Did you find any moments of relief? Was there any entertainment?

1 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Entertainment, sure, ~~was~~ entertainment.
2 If we were able to steal something to eat, we made a big party. That was our
3 entertainment.

4 THE INTERVIEWER: Holiday entertainment? The --

5 ERNEST HOLLANDER: No, no, nothing like that.

6 THE INTERVIEWER: Where you were?

7 ERNEST HOLLANDER: We work six days, twelve hours a day,
8 Sunday was the day that we washed our clothes, and it was a half day of rest.

9 THE INTERVIEWER: Were there anything specific, any
10 specific problems that were different for men or ~~women that you knew of?~~ Did
11 men have more resources?

12 ERNEST HOLLANDER: We had --

13 THE INTERVIEWER: Were -- were -- can you tell?

14 ERNEST HOLLANDER: We had no resources at all. We didn't
15 hear about news, we didn't know nothing about news. We didn't even know
16 where we are. We didn't even know how close we are to a city or to any
17 people that we could talk to. We were just -- immediate with the concentration
18 camp people.

19 THE INTERVIEWER: Yeah, you were very young at the time.

20 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Yeah, I was 15 years old and my
21 younger brother was not even 14.

22 THE INTERVIEWER: Almost the same age as your brother,
23 but --

24 ERNEST HOLLANDER: One of the youngest that survived.

25 THE INTERVIEWER: Yes, that's right. Tell me what -- do
you recall what was the relationship between Jewish prisoners and non-Jews,
or were there any non-Jews?

ERNEST HOLLANDER: There was no non-Jews in my camp, it was

1 all Jewish people, and most of them were from Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

2 THE INTERVIEWER: What was your experience of
3 (YUDENBRA--)? You know, the Jewish leadership.

4 ERNEST HOLLANDER: The Jewish leadership. Jewish
5 leadership in our -- where I come from, were all religious --

6 THE INTERVIEWER: And in the camp?

7 ERNEST HOLLANDER: In the camp. In the camp was no
8 leaders, no --

9 THE INTERVIEWER: Not --

10 ERNEST HOLLANDER -- no action at all, that kind of action.

11 THE INTERVIEWER: Were you medically experimented upon?

12 ERNEST HOLLANDER: No, no me, personally, and not my
13 brother.

14 THE INTERVIEWER: Now, tell me, and I know you have very
15 strong feelings in this respect: How has Israel been meaningful to you?

16 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Israel was su much meaningful to me,
17 that the only brother I had left after the concentration camp, and he was
18 able to come out through some kind of organization, to America, and I didn't
19 want to go to America and I went to Israel.

20 Then I came to Israel 1945, and I -- I volunteered, being only
21 18 years old, less than 18, I volunteered to fight for Iszrael, and I went
22 underground with the (--inaudible--). I lived in (--inaudible--) for awhile,
23 then I moved to (HIDELBURG--), and I was very proud to be in that organization,
24 to the last day. I was -- was unfortunat things once in awhile, but I was
25 very proud, also, to be in the group that took out the (CALENSHIP--) that
something to that, and, also, I was in the '48 Liberation War two and a half

1 years. I was three times wounded; I was twice in the hospital, once --

2 THE INTERVIEWER: How are you now?

3 ERNEST HOLLANDER: I still suffer from ear infections,
4 that a schrapnel went into my ear.

5 THE INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

6 ERNEST HOLLANDER: I have a bullet, just a flesh wound,
7 an inch from my heart, so I am very happy that I am alive now and I --

8 THE INTERVIEWER: You look like a picture of health,
9 Ernie.

10 ERNEST HOLLANDER: I do visit Israel every two years.
11 My vocation, I am going to always to Israel.

12 THE INTERVIEWER: Wonderful.

13 MR. HOLLANDER: One of these days, I go settled back to
14 Israel.

15 THE INTERVIEWER: Two more simple questions, but they
16 mean a great deal to the scholars who want to make something out of this.

17 There is an expression, Ernie, that the Jews went "like sheep
18 to the slaughter." What do you think of that?

19 ERNEST HOLLANDER: In my twon, it's true. In my town, it's
20 true because our parents were very pious and religious people, and they just
21 didn't believe in the new school, they believed in the old school, "They
22 hit you, hold the other cheek." And they believed, always, that God will
23 come and help, and they always wanted to praying, and they thought with
24 prayers they would be liberated, but after awhile, we saw that God helps only
25 those who help themselves. Very nice to believe in God, you have to try on
your own.

26 THE INTERVIEWER: You know the words I get to (inaudible)
people did fight back; a lot of people tried to escape, you know. Tell me,

1 Ernie, do you speak of the holocaust very often?

2 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Yes. I tell you what I did. Every time
3 I go to Israel, I see difference things, that it is important to Israel,
4 and six years ago I went to Israel and I went to visit (the hospital/or
5 HOUSE CONTROL).

6 I should start after the '73 War, when I became very active in
7 the community, I went in '73 to Israel, and I went to a hospital and I saw
8 soldiers who were half a year, they were still in a coma, and I spoke to the
9 doctor in the hospital, and he said they need -- badly need a I-Track machine
10 that goes to the computer that they made, but they cannot afforded to buy
11 that I-Track computer.

12 Well, I came back to Oakland and I tried to raise money. We
13 raised \$60,000 at one dinner, and I were able to order from Skokie, Illinois,
14 that I-Track machine, and I send it to Israel. I am proud it is in the V
15 Veteran's Hospital.

16 Then I took a (TODA--), they asked (TODAS--) and I was very
17 proud, also, to bring over (TODA--) to one of the hospitals. Came over
18 there and I talked to some people that were involved in the American end of
19 it, and they told me the story, how badly they need ambulances. Like he
20 made a joke, he said that a woman never have children in the hospital
21 because the ambulance are so bumpy, they are so bad, by the time the lady
22 arrives to the hospital, the baby just falls out. That was a joke.

23 I came back to Oakland and I organized the first chapter of
24 the (AMERICAN-----ISRAEL), and I am very proud, only not for myself, I took
25 ambulance, already, to Israel and one is over, going right now. Right now.
I think we have enough money to buy the third one.

THE INTERVIEWER: How much money does it take to buy one?

ERNEST HOLLANDER: It takes \$16,000, just a shell.

1 THE INTERVIEWER: Just a shell, not a --

2 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Then we tried to raise the money for
3 equipment.

4 THE INTERVIEWER: Yes.

5 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Then I took back the ambulance and
6 I was interviewed by somebody from the Jewish National Fund. Well, I threw
7 myself in the Jewish National Fund Organization, and I am very active, and,
8 last year, I am very proud that Senator Church came and honored me at (HOPE--)
9 Motel in Oakland, and they planted a yard in my name, and then they give like a
10 (SHIVA--), and, as you see, I always throw myself into youth projects, and I
11 just don't care, as long as it is a good cause, I am willing and able to and
12 happy to do it.

13 THE INTERVIEWER: Thank you.

14 ERNEST HOLLANDER: One of my main, main goals is the
15 youth, and you asked me before, about youth, if I --

16 THE INTERVIEWER: Yes, please, we have plenty of time.

17 ERNEST HOLLANDER: I am the youth advisor, the youth
18 director, and the youth organizer and first chapter of the NCSY, National
19 Conference of (SIVIK) Youth in Oakland. I organized the first chapter in
20 Northern California; I did one San Francisco; one Israel; one in San Jose.
21 There is many in California, Los Angeles, and I am doing it for over 20 years.
22 God forbid, not for pay, it is just -- it is a pleasure of mine to enjoy.
23 I drive around with the kids, I am taking them all over the United States
24 and Canada to different (inaudible) conventions, seminars.

25 I received, five times, Advisor of the Year, (--inaudible--)
of America, and three years ago, I was honored by the New York International
Organization of NCSY, Man of the Decade, and now, not only I am speaking out
to Jewish kids, also to the non-Jewish community. I am invited, next week,

1 to speak about holocaust in (--inaudible--) in a Church in Heywood in a couple
2 weeks, I have appointment to talk of the holocaust and I try to spread the
3 word around wherever we can, wherever I can. I don't care how, as long as I
4 do it, and I hope -- I hope they will take the lessons, those non-Jewish
5 communities, that what happened, and they will help us, also, to prevent
6 another holocaust in the future, hopefully.

7 THE INTERVIEWER: Well said. Okay. I think we need more
8 people like you, Ernie. Thank you very much for this presentation.

9 ERNEST HOLLANDER: It is my pleasure, Claudia, and I
10 was very happy that you interviewed me.

11 THE INTERVIEWER: Well, I am very happy to have seen you
12 here.

13 ERNEST HOLLANDER: Because we are neighbors and we are
14 (--inaudible--).

15 THE INTERVIEWER: Right. Thanks again, Ernie.

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