

HVT-179

K., Pinek 1924-

Pinek K. Holocaust video testimony (HVT-179) interviewed by Barry Stahlmann, May 28, 1996.

3 copies: 1 SVHS first camera; 1 SVHS second camera; 1 VHS copy.

Summary: Pinek was born on July 17, 1924 in Opatov, Poland. His parents had seven children and raised them in a religious home. Pinek's father came from Russia. He copied Torah scrolls and was well known across Poland. His mother owned and managed a grocery store in Opatov. Pinek went to cheder and Polish school. The family spoke Yiddish at home, while the children spoke Polish and German in school. As a youth, Pinek remembers experiencing antisemitism. In 1938, two Polish boys stood outside the family's grocery store shouting that people should not buy from the Jews. Pinek attacked them with a stick. A Polish police officer sent the Polish boys away for "treatment". Pinek's family felt it could not leave Poland because four of the seven children were married and already had their own children, homes, and stores.

When the German Army arrived in Opatov, Pinek was searched by German soldiers. He remembers that the Germans harassed the Jewish population and destroyed property. Pinek's oldest brother fled to Russia. For two years, Pinek worked for the Germans performing odd jobs such as shining shoes and shovelling snow. An SS officer took Pinek to a work camp and put him to work in a General's home. He cleaned the house, chopped wood, and built fires. In 1943, he was transferred to Starkovisz, where he worked in a steel factory. In late 1943, Pinek was sent to Auschwitz. Upon his arrival, he found a friend from Opatov. This friend instructed him to tell the guards he was sixteen and that he was a painter. Apparently, the Nazis needed people for construction. Pinek was sent to his friend's block and was taught how to paint and plaster walls. The other inmates tried to protect Pinek by helping him finish his work. Once, Pinek was beaten brutally by an SS officer and was sick for eight days. Again, the other inmates helped finish Pinek's work so he could avoid further punishment. One day, the same SS officer brought Pinek into his office and asked him how he was feeling. Every day, this officer questioned Pinek about his health. Pinek slept in the officer's office and he received lighter work assignments. For reasons unexplained, this officer defended and protected Pinek on several occasions. Pinek found one of his brothers in Auschwitz. This brother told him that their family had been murdered in Treblinka.

In January 1945, Auschwitz was evacuated. Pinek and his brother were forced to march with a group of prisoners to Gleiwitz. As the group approached a forest, Pinek and his brother decided to escape because they thought that they were going to be killed. The German soldiers chased them and Pinek's brother was shot in the back of the head. Pinek escaped and survived in the forest by eating grass. Eventually, he left the forest and reached a house owned by a German couple. They fed and clothed him. The couple thought he was German because he spoke German very well. Pinek told the German couple he was Polish and had escaped from Auschwitz. He was hidden by this couple and they cared for him.

A detachment of American soldiers arrived at the German couple's house and Pinek spoke with them. He met a soldier who spoke Yiddish who told him he would be cared for. The soldiers gave him an American uniform and took Pinek to a hospital in Munich, where a Jewish physician tended to him. One month later, Pinek travelled to Dachau where he identified SS officers for the American military. He also registered with the Jewish community in Munich and received a home, but allowed the German owner to remain in the house. He found two of his brothers and their families and brought them all to Munich. Pinek himself planned to leave for the United States.

In 1948, men from the Hagganah approached him and offered him an opportunity to fight in the Israeli Army for one year. He accepted the offer and sailed to Haifa via Marseilles. In Haifa, Pinek was sent to an army camp, where he spent his days training and his nights fighting on the Israeli-Egyptian border. After the war, he took further military training courses, became an officer and stayed in the army for 19 years, participating in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948, the Sinai Campaign in 1956, and the Six Day War in 1967. Pinek married in 1951 and had three daughters.

In 1967, Pinek came to Canada to visit a friend who was also survivor of Auschwitz. His friend convinced him to remain in Montreal. He started a business and opened a cafeteria located in downtown Montreal. In 1995, Pinek sold the cafeteria and retired.