

Interview with Juan Carlos Kantor

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Interviewer: Andrea Stutman

Juan Carlos Kantor Edelstein was born in Prague on March 26, 1938. Juan was one year old when the family left Europe, and he was told that emigrating was difficult. They spent about 4 months in Paris awaiting the visa to Chile. They departed from Le Havre, on a ship to Buenos Aires and found the way to Santiago, Chile from there on the trans-Andean train. It was a shock to arrive there from the advanced, cultured Europe. Father took a long time to adjust. He had been a lawyer in Prague. Mother did better. They arrived with some economic means, and they did not have as hard a time as many other immigrants.

The family decided to leave Czechoslovakia for the following reason: the father had won a very big law suit, after which the mother picked up a phone message from the opposing counsel that said: "your Jewish s.o.b.'s husband will never win another trial in this country. Tell him that". The mother decided they had to leave the country, against the wishes of her husband and the rest of the very large family. They left with the two sons, but the rest of the extended family stayed, thinking the mother was crazy. The family was well adjusted in the general community. The father had been able to pursue his studies without impediment. They could not see the mother's concern. (The entire extended family was murdered during the war.)

Mother's family was observant. Father's family was -more assimilated.

In Chile, father was the "chargee d'affairs" of the Czech embassy representing the exiled government in London. Father had meant to return to Prague after the war, but a Communist government was installed. In 1946, mother went to Czechoslovakia to test the waters, but decided they could not return as the Communist regime was already firmly established there. Father was also offered a diplomatic post by the regime, but he did not accept.

Mother was marked by the loss of her family forever. She was of the firm belief that Jews go to the slaughter. In Chile, they did not affiliate with the Jewish community, and did not inculcate any Jewish teachings to her sons. They lived as non-Jews outwardly however they talked like Jews and ate like Jews at home. It was a strange situation. Only as a mature adult Juan Carlos went back to Judaism, and on a trip to Miami he noticed that Jews were not being killed. Before his civil wedding to a Jewish girl, his mother lamented that his children will be killed as Jews...Juan Carlos' psychoanalyst told him that the Holocaust trauma affects four generations. His older brother married a non-Jew and lived as a Catholic (but supports heartily the State of Israel, as does Juan Carlos.) He was not interested in going back to his roots like his brother did.\*

Juan Carlos has little information about the murder of his family. The two grandfathers died before the war. The two grandmothers perished in concentration camps. A maternal uncle died in the March of Death a day before liberation.

Juan Carlos's statement about the value of testimonies.

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