Summary of Oral History: Luis Opatowski Goldberg

RG#: RG-50.986.0012

This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [05/2022]

Luis Opatowski Goldberg, born in Brussels, Belgium, on May 13, 1936, son of Motko Opatowski, from Gombin (Poland), and Sarah Goldberg, from Siedlce (Poland). He has two siblings: a sister, Janet, born in Belgium in 1946, and a brother, Roberto, born in Mexico in 1953/4.

His father was a tailor. His mother had seven siblings. One of them, David Goldberg, was a founding member of the Polish Communist Party; he was imprisoned in Poland and later sent to Belgium as a political prisoner with five other Jewish comrades. Luis's mother went to Brussels to help her brother. In 1933, she met Luis's father and got married. They both kept Polish citizenship.

Luis and his family lived in Brussels, in Rue de Soignies, 35. Luis's school was in Rue des Six Jetons, 66. When the Nazi army invaded Belgium, he was four years old.

His uncle David went to France during the war and asked Luis's family to join him. Luis's family took a train to Paris, but ended up going to Toulouse because the train tracks to Paris were destroyed. They spent three months in Revel, a small village near Toulouse. After that, they went to Nice, Cannes, and tried to reach Switzerland, but could not cross the border. They went back to Brussels, where they had to wear a star. Luis could not go back to school. His father got fake IDs. In his ID, Luis's name was Jean Louis Vanderbelt. They hid in neighborhoods outside the city. His father worked as a tailor for a non-Jewish friend, [Isaac Pireaux] (1:05:12), hiding in a basement for around three months.

Luis remembers moving often and hiding in different places. He was in a convent for a few months. He does not remember how it happened, but he was taken in a train to Le Struthof camp, in Alsace. His father and other prisoners worked in underground weapons factories. One day, the German soldiers left and the Allies liberated the camp. He remembered two British tanks and the Scottish guard. The Allies moved most prisoners to a camp for displaced people, near Leipzig, Germany. Luis's family stayed there around a month before going back to his home in Brussels. It was 1945.

In Belgium, the Joint helped them economically. Luis went back to the same school that he was attending before the war. Luis's father was part of the Zionist Revisionist movement and wanted to go to Palestine. However, his group asked him to stay in Belgium and help send weapons to Palestine.

His uncle David went from France to North Africa and, after that, intended to go to Cuba. However, he ended up in Veracruz, Mexico. He sent Mexican visas to Luis's family and, on November 1, 1950, Luis and his parents arrived in Mexico in a cargo ship called [Brevin] (52:09) that had left from a port near Antwerp. They were traveling with another family, but Luis does not remember their names. His uncle David was waiting for them in Veracruz, and they all spent one night in the Hotel Diligencias. After that, they went to Mexico City by car.

Luis's family lived one month at his uncle's place in Cuernavaca Street, 117, Colonia Condesa. After that, they rented a place in Pachuca Street, but soon moved to another apartment on Sonora Street. Luis studied Textile Engineering at the Politécnico and also got a master's degree from ITT Boston. His siblings went to the Colegio Israelita. His father opened a store in La Lagunilla, Mexico City, and Luis became a Mexican citizen in October 1953. His father arrived in Mexico when he was forty, and never got used to it. Luis was 34 when his father died at age 62, and 40 when his mother died.

Luis married twice and has eight children, two in the US and the rest in Mexico. At the time of the interview, he had eleven grandchildren and five great granddaughters.

From his father's side, he does not know what happened to his grandfather. From his mother's side, he knows more because his mother went back to Poland in the seventies, to Siedlce. Around 1960, his uncle David visited Israel and found two of his cousins who went to Israel from Poland in the 1930s, and who were among the founders of two kibbutz, Shefayim and Beit Ha Shita.