

Oral history interview with Simon Kagan Summary

Simon Kagan was born in 1930, in Mir, Poland (present day Belarus), to seven older sisters. He spent the school year at Talmud Torah and summers swimming in a nearby river.

On June 27, 1941, the first German detachments had arrived in the area. At 5:00 am, on November 9, 1941, by order to conduct a 24-hour slaughter, the Gestapo chased Jews out of their homes, sparing strong tradesmen, and sending the rest to mass graves. The Germans had entered Simon's home, but his sister Sara had hid Simon in a cellar full of potatoes, while Sara hid behind the stove. He hid all day and all night, hearing cries of screaming and crying, fearing being pulled out any minute. At 7:00 am the next morning the cellar door opened and it was his sister. His father Moshe, mother Nechama, and sisters Chira and Mira had been killed. His sister, Chaia, who was pregnant at the time, had been in a hospital giving birth, and thus was safe. Kunya and Bella, also survived this first of two mass slaughters. His oldest sister Ida, had already been living in what is now Israel.

The Jews that remained, only 800 in total, were grouped together in a small ghetto in the town where they lived until May 1942 when they were transferred to live in a Middle-Ages castle with 5-storied towers, thick stones walls and deep cellars. Oswald Rufeisen, a young Jewish man, disguised as a German interpreter, acted as an informant to those in the castle. He reported that on August 9, 1942, there was to be a killing of all the Jews in the castle. His secret guidance allowed those able to run, to have an early escape. Simon and 200 others, jumped through a 4x2 foot window, 12-feet off the ground, and ran into the forest. His sisters Sara, Kunya and Bella hid in the cellars below and were spared in this second mass killing. Unable to run, his sister Chaia and her newly born child were killed. Simon, and later Kunya, Sara and Bella, joined a partisan group in the forest, where he spent the remainder of the war. Being young and small, he was often sent to tight places to help blow up trains. Bella was killed during her time as a partisan while sitting and cooking potatoes on the fire.

Family was very important and precious to Simon. Simon remained close to his remaining three sisters, caring for them and their children as well as anyone in need. He married in Winnipeg in 1956 and fathered three children. Simon died in 1993.