

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Holocaust Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 418

LOU SCHOTLAND

Interviewed

by

Mary Ann Seman

on

April 29, 1980

## LOU SCHOTLAND

Lou Schotland and his wife Dorothy, who reside in Youngstown, Ohio, are both survivors of the Holocaust of World War II. Born in Zwolen, Poland, on January 9, 1922, Mr. Schotland recalls a happy childhood that ended at age seventeen due to World War II and the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939.

From this point on, life changed tremendously for the Schotland family as they were forced from their home and placed in a ghetto. In 1940, Mr. Schotland was put to work by the Gestapo cleaning stables. In the spring of 1942, Mr. Schotland's parents were deported to the camp of Treblinka and never seen alive again. Mr. Schotland was deported to various concentration camps after being separated from his ailing wife who had no idea of what had happened to him. Mr. Schotland recalls incidents during which he was beaten by Nazi police for no apparent reason other than his Jewishness.

Following the war, Mr. Schotland while in Italy discovered that his wife had also survived the war. They were reunited and left Europe for the United States. Mr. Schotland carried little bitterness in his heart and set out to make a new life for himself. Employed by United Service Company, Mr. Schotland enjoys his children, Marvin and Gloria, gardening and his membership in the Zionists of America. Mr. Schotland belongs also to the Ohev-Tzedek Temple.

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INTERVIEWEE: LOU SCHOTLAND

INTERVIEWER: Mary Ann Seman

SUBJECT: Concentration Camps, Personal Losses due to the War,  
Punishment of Prisoners

DATE: April 29, 1980

MS: This is an interview with Mr. Lou Schotland for the Youngstown State University Program on the Holocaust Project, by Mary Ann Seman at 418 Jaronte Drive, Youngstown, Ohio, at 8:00 p.m. on April 29, 1980.

Mr. Schotland, could you tell me something about your present life?

LS: Right now I am an associate at United Service Company, the division Penn-Ohio Towel. I'm a marketing representative.

MS: Could you tell me something about your home life in the past?

LS: I was born in Poland. Zwolen was the name of the city. I was there until 1935. In 1935 my family moved to Radom, Poland, which was about thirty kilometers from Zwolen. We resided in Radom until the war in 1939. In 1939, when the Nazis occupied Poland, in the middle of September sometime, I ran away to a community called Lublin. It was about 150 kilometers from Radom. The reason I ran away was because we were scared about the Nazis. Myself and a brother of mine ran away. We had an uncle there, so we ran away to the city of Lublin. Afterwhile, this city was occupied by the Russians, so it was just as bad over there as with the Nazis. Then we came back to my hometown. That reunited myself and my brother with our parents by the end of 1939. Of course, then we were occupied by the Nazis.

MS: Did you have a big family?

- LS: Yes. We had five children, three brothers and two sisters. The older sister and I survived. She presently lives in Florida.
- MS: What did your father do for a living?
- LS: My father was in the leather business. He was a merchant in the leather business.
- MS: What was your childhood like? Was it a happy childhood?
- LS: Yes. Of course, my childhood ended at seventeen. When the war started I was only seventeen, so that's when it stopped. When we were occupied by the Nazis that's when my life stopped.
- MS: Did you attend school?
- LS: Yes, grade school in Poland.
- MS: Did you continue your education, or was it interrupted?
- LS: It was interrupted.
- MS: When you were going to school did you ever experience any harassment because of your religion?
- LS: No, not in Poland.
- MS: You got along with your neighbors?
- LS: Yes.
- MS: You first became aware of the Nazis in 1939?
- LS: We were aware, actually, since 1933, of what was going on. We didn't feel it in Poland until 1939 because then they occupied Poland, but we knew what we had read in the paper. They had evacuated Jewish people from Germany as early as 1935 and 1936 and they started coming into Poland. I personally didn't feel it. I heard about it, but I didn't feel it until 1939. Of course, we were scared. We knew about it. We heard what was going on since 1933. In Poland itself, we didn't feel it until 1939.
- MS: That's interesting that you knew as far back as 1933.
- LS: Yes. We read it in the papers. It was, like I mentioned before, that some people of the Jewish faith were evacuated from Germany into Poland. We knew about those things, what was going on, since 1933.

MS: Since you knew what might be fairing for you in the future, did your family ever consider leaving Poland?

LS: My dad was considering coming to the United States as early as 1936 or 1937. Not for that reason--there were different reasons. He had a brother in Patterson, New Jersey. He [the brother] was a rabbi here. When he died in 1937, he was making plans to come to the United States. He didn't make it because the war started. He was due to come here in November, but when the war started in September of 1939 he couldn't make it to the American Consulate to get his visa in time.

MS: What happened when you did, finally, return to your hometown in the end of 1939?

LS: When we came back, I had my family, my parents. Things were very bad, but I wanted to go home to my family. When I came back the Nazis were in full operation in Poland. As an example, they started with the educated people, the leaders of the community; they arrested those people and they beat them up. They established a fear in the people, so later the masses fell into it. I was caught by the Gestapo to work as early as 1940, to work in the stables to clean horses. I was hit by a horse. I almost died at that time. The reason I didn't is because my stomach was emptied the doctor told me afterwards. It didn't actually bust my insides.

MS: I would imagine you were deported?

LS: Well, I was not what you call deported at that time. You see, what happened in Poland is they took the Jewish people from a large area and they squeezed them into smaller areas and smaller, smaller areas. Then they evacuated my parents, and my wife's parents into Eastern Poland to Treblinka and we never saw them again. This happened as early as 1942, when they started evacuation to those camps. That was the first one.

Then they squeezed us into a smaller area, maybe three or four streets. One night they made us come out to the outside of that area and they chased most of the people to the trains to be evacuated, and the rest of us they left alone.

The rest they put to work in the factories, where they made ammunition, guns and all that stuff. I was caught in October of 1942, that was when I was in the smaller ghetto, the smallest one they had. They took me into the headquarters of the Gestapo, myself and another young man by the name of Berman. They got us drunk, made fun of us, made us tell stories so that we didn't know what we were talking

about. Then they made us sign some papers. They kept us for three weeks in the basement of Gestapo headquarters in the city of Radom.

After three weeks they took myself and this other fellow into the city jail in Radom, from the Gestapo headquarters, for the night. The next morning they put us on a train. They picked out from Radom Jail at that time just three of us, myself, this other boy--a young fellow--and another man who was also a Jewish fellow.

In every little village, every station from Radom, between Radom and Auschwitz, they stopped in every little village to pick up people, not Jewish people, Poles. By the time we got there, there were, I would say, at least three hundred people.

At that time I didn't know what went on, but now I realize it. What the Gestapo did, in order to justify their being there, was establish a system to take innocent people, arrest those people, make up some papers to show their leaders that they were needed back home, so they didn't have to go fight on the front line. In order to justify their being there, that's why they did all those things to those people. They arrested innocent people and then showed proof. They said, "Look, here are people who were going to overthrow the German government." But we had nothing to do with it. They just took innocent people.

There were schoolteachers, priests on this train. Like I said, when we got there, there were over three hundred people of various religions.

I was at Auschwitz through May of 1943. At that time I worked unloading the barracks. Then they took me away to a camp that was called Jaworzno where I worked in the coal mines, from May 1943 to December 18, 1944. In December of 1944 the chaos began already. The Russians were coming from the east and the allies from the west. They evacuated the whole camp. When they took count there were 3500 prisoners, whatever you want to call them, prisoner or innocent people in prison doing free work.

The next place was Blechhamer. That was January 18th of 1945 or the 21st or 22nd of 1945. We got to our destination which was about 300 kilometers maybe; more was called Blechhamer. Again they took a count and there were only 1800 left out of the 3500. The rest of them were dying on the highway, killed like dogs, anybody who couldn't walk. At one time I fell asleep--I was undernourished and tired--if somebody hadn't kicked me I probably would have been killed. Somebody kicked me, so they woke me up and they pulled me a little bit and I kept going.

When we got to Blechhamer they started to chase us again. Myself and another fellow hid under the bunks. We said, "We're not leaving this place anymore." The Nazis came in and chased us. It was chaos already. After they chased us we were hidden and then things quieted down.

We heard some shots from the guard. Towards evening that day everything quieted down already. We knew at that time that the Nazis were gone. The next morning we ran out into the woods and we were picked up by the Russians. This was January 23, 1945.

MS: Before you were arrested you said the Nazis had confined the Jews to a small area. A ghetto?

LS: Yes.

MS: How long were you in the ghetto?

LS: The Jewish people were spread all over, like in any town, any people wherever they want to live. First they called the leaders of all nationalities. They got the names of all the Jewish people, and then they passed a law that all the Jewish people should move into certain areas, smaller areas. Little by little they squeezed them and made them move from one place to another. They had to leave everything behind, just grab whatever you can; that's how it was done. This took place from the beginning of 1940 to 1942.

MS: I would imagine it was very crowded in those small areas.

LS: Oh yes.

MS: What were the conditions there?

LS: The conditions were very bad. There were rations. The only way people had to survive is if they made contact with outside people, some friends to help them out. There was never enough to eat, never.

MS: You were with some of your family members?

LS: I was with my parents.

MS: Was there any smuggling in the ghetto?

LS: What do you mean by smuggling?

MS: Illegally leaving the ghetto.

LS: Illegally from whose viewpoint?

MS: From the Nazis' viewpoint.

LS: Yes. There were Poles who brought some food over, and some other things. We had to do that in order to survive. They had to smuggle in some things whenever they could help themselves. People had some friends--Poles--from their older years. Some of them helped, some of them didn't. Some were scared. Some of them were mean themselves, but some of them helped.

MS: How was the ghetto enclosed?

LS: They were not enclosed. They were just assigned to certain streets. You were not allowed to leave after dark. You had to stay inside at dark. Of course, we identified by the white band with the star of David. What you said about smuggling, if people wanted to go out and endanger their life, they took the band off. They took a chance. If they were caught they were prosecuted or put in jail or killed on the spot.

The Gestapo used to come into the ghetto at night and attack people. Myself and Dorothy, my wife, lived across the street from each other. Her brother was my best friend. When I was in their house one night they came up. We were sitting at the table talking, playing a little cards socially. They really, actually, physically beat me up.

MS: For no reason?

LS: For no reason. They picked on a few people and beat them up.

MS: Eventually they did enclose the ghetto.

LS: Yes.

MS: Brick walls?

LS: No, it was not brick walls. They just surrounded it by police. If they had brick walls, that was maybe after I left. It was not while I was there. There were no brick walls. In Europe the buildings are big and the streets are narrow. They had to put a few policemen on each corner and watch it, that's all.

MS: Were there many police?

LS: There were quite a few policemen.



MS: Were they members of the Gestapo?

LS: No. Some of them were members of the Gestapo on the outside. Some of the policemen were members of our own people. They didn't have any guns, but they were sort of like a double policeman, without any guns. They were there to impose the laws of the Nazis. That was their job, to enforce the law of the Nazis.

MS: You said you were beaten up by a member of the Gestapo. What did they look like? How did they dress?

LS: They were dressed in a uniform. Sometimes they came with the regular army uniform, the green one with the black stripes. Sometimes they came with the black uniforms with the big black hats like you see on television, big boots, guns, and sticks. Sometimes a civilian came along with them, a German civilian who was the leader. He could have been a German who lived in Poland all the years. He knew the exact areas to take the soldiers around. The Gestapo, the leaders, took him around and showed him the Jewish places of business.

MS: That man would be betraying the Jews because he knew the territory?

LS: Right. This was a German who lived in Poland for years, maybe a spy.

MS: You were then deported from your ghetto to Auschwitz?

LS: Yes.

MS: And you worked?

LS: In the camps? Yes. I worked in Radom too. I left something out, it has been so long. I had relatives who had a leather factory. They were making leather for shoes--whatever leather they made. I worked for them even before the war started, just helping out. When the war started I went to work for them. They made this smaller ghetto and we were working there day and night in order to survive. We were afraid, so we worked there. Finally, the leader of that factory happened to be a German civilian. That civilian German was like the vice-president of the corporation. He kept quiet. He endangered his life by not saying anything. Finally, he got scared and he said, "Look. You have to leave or I've got to report you to them because I'm afraid." He reported us and the leader of the Gestapo came and took us out. They knew that we were working there. There were about seven or eight of us, Jewish people who were working in that factory.

They took us out and we were standing by the wall. They were ready to shoot us. There was one Gestapo officer by the name of Schiekel. He came along and said, "Don't shoot them. Just let them go back to the ghetto." If it wasn't for him, we probably would all have been killed. Somehow he had a connection with the leader of the factory. That's how I survived. All of us were ready to be killed, standing by the wall. Just shoot us.

MS: You were in Auschwitz during the war?

LS: Yes, October 1942 through May 1943.

MS: What was it like in Auschwitz?

LS: It was tough and it was hard. You had to do things for survival. First, I worked on the train station; that's what they called it. Bahn-Hoff took us out to unload the barracks, the rafters and new pieces of barracks. We pushed the trains into an area. We would work seven days a week. In the morning we got up about 4:30 or 5:00 and stayed in line and waited. Summer, winter, we would stay to be counted. They used to give you, in the morning, just coffee. At night you used to get coffee, and maybe a couple slice of bread. Soup, of course, you got every day. On the weekend, they used to give you a little bit of meat in the soup ladle. But it was just hardly enough to survive.

MS: Were there a lot of people in the prison?

LS: When I got to Auschwitz, about twenty thousand I would say. When I got there they tattooed my number. I was 77,019. There were already that many at that time. There were about nineteen or twenty thousand of us there at the time.

MS: When you arrived in camp, did you arrive with anybody?

LS: Yes. I came with a group . . . they took three of us out from Radom and when we got to Auschwitz there were about three hundred of us on the train. They picked up, in every village, maybe a few people here and there. Most of them were Poles, on that particular transport. When I got there I met some transports who came from different areas, Jewish people from different areas, not just from Radom, but from different areas of Poland.

MS: Were men and women separated?

LS: Yes.

MS: What was it like when you were there? About how many

people?

LS: To be truthful I don't remember. It was a big place. I would say there were about three hundred of the barracks. There were wooden barracks, wooden floors, and no washroom facilities in the barracks. You had to go to another place to get washed.

MS: Where did you sleep?

LS: In the bunk. There were two on the bottom, two on the top, six bunks together. Plus, there were a whole bunch of sections of bunks.

MS: Were you aware of the Nazis inflicting any torture on people, besides killing them, torturing them?

LS: Oh yes. Sure. I was beaten myself a lot of times. Many times I was beaten by the Nazis, many times.

MS: How old were you at this time?

LS: I was born in 1922. When the war started I was seventeen. I was twenty years old when I was sent away into the concentration camp.

MS: Were there very many older men in your barracks?

LS: Not many. I happened to be a young fellow and I was thrown in a system where I had to work. Later on, people got sick. People were afraid to say they were sick because if they stayed in the hospital longer than they should, right away they took them out and to the crematoriums. People were afraid at Auschwitz. This did happen. Of course, I was not too long at Auschwitz myself. I was there from November of 1942 to May of 1943. Then I went to Jaworzno. This was really something else. It wasn't like Auschwitz where there was strictly a camp where people worked. They were scared, they had to work. If not, they took them on trucks and went to different places where they burned them. In the camp itself there was no such thing as burning. They took them away to other areas.

MS: You were aware of the crematoriums?

LS: Oh yes! I was aware.

MS: Would you say you watched a lot of people to to the crematoriums?

LS: Quite a bit. I don't know the exact amount because the traffic was coming in and every day new people were coming

in. A lot of them didn't get the chance to go to work even. They took all the women and children in the beginning. People went through that and they knew about it.

MS: Were many people suffering from disease?

LS: Yes. A lot of people died. They had infections on their feet and sore spots.

MS: There was a hospital?

LS: Yes, there was a hospital facility.

MS: I understand from what I've read before that people were afraid to go to the hospital.

LS: That's right. If the people were sick and the Gestapo came in and said, "Well, we got too many people; let's get rid of them," they just came and picked them up and got rid of them. People actually were afraid to go to the hospital. They would rather die on the job before they would go to the hospital. Many of them died that way.

MS: What was your health condition when you left Auschwitz?

LS: When I escaped I know I weighed about ninety pounds. I was kind of weak.

MS: Before you escaped you went to a labor camp?

LS: No. That was not just a labor camp, it was a concentration camp. It was a regular concentration camp. They took us out of the camp and we had to go to work in the coal mines. They had civilian Germans which were drilling the coal. They did the shooting. Our job was to load the coal, put it on the wagon, and send it out.

MS: Were there many women in this camp?

LS: No, just strictly men.

MS: Were the conditions similar to Auschwitz?

LS: Similar, right. The only difference was they didn't have crematoriums there. They put the people on trucks and took them away.

MS: People didn't die just strictly by being burned. There were other ways of killing them.

LS: Not in Jaworzno. Like I said, there were no crematoriums in that camp. At least I didn't know about them. If there

were, I think I would have known. I know that they took people on the trucks, and they took them to other camps, to Auschwitz or Treblinka.

MS: People weren't killed in this camp. They were taken out and disposed of?

LS: Right.

MS: Were you aware of any other way that the Jews were being put to death, besides being gassed?

LS: Well, yes. For example, they were shooting then, like I mentioned in the beginning. In January of 1945, when they took us out, we went to this camp Blechhamer in Jaworzno. When we left, we took the count in the prison, there were 3500 people. When we got to Blechhamer, they took the count and there were only 1800 left. The reason for this is because they were falling and dying and anybody that couldn't move, they just killed. They just took the gun and shot them. They wanted to make sure they didn't leave anybody who was alive. Half of them froze to death or got killed.

MS: Your stay in the camps did not end at the second camp. You were transported on January 18, 1945?

LS: Yes. From the second to the third, to Blechhamer. That's when I got liberated. I remember they moved us on the 18th. It took about three days. I don't know the exact date. When they wouldn't go any further, they tried to chase us out of the barracks, "Rouse! Rouse! Rouse!" Myself and another fellow and there were others, hid in the barracks. Then when things quieted down, we went out to the woods. That's when we were picked up by the Russians.

MS: This was when?

LS: 1945.

MS: This is what you say is your escape then?

LS: Right, that is correct.

MS: After the Russians picked you up, then what?

LS: Then we were taken to Poland.

MS: What happened there?

LS: When we came back to Poland, they were under the Russians at that time. It was occupied by the Russians. Poland was not completely liberated yet. There was a small Jewish

community with very few people. I stayed there for awhile. Then I went back into Czechoslovakia. From Czechoslovakia I was picked up by the Americans. They took us into Austria. From Austria we went to Italy and I stayed in a camp in Santa Maria. The camp was right by the end of Italy. I shouldn't say camp. It was a camp where they fed us and they made us gain some weight.

MS: At this time you were alone?

LS: Right.

MS: You had no idea what happened to your family?

LS: No.

MS: Did you know at this time that you had lost your parents?

LS: I had no contact; I had not known, no.

MS: It wasn't until after the war that you . . .

LS: Right.

MS: Only yourself and one sister survived?

LS: And my wife.

MS: That's just your immediate family though, did you have a much larger family?

LS: I had a cousin survive. She was saved by a Pole. She [my wife] can tell you in more detail what happened to her, how she survived. I don't know the exact details, because she happened to be in the same camp with her in Radom. She survived and that's about all. Some distant cousins survived, one here and one there.

MS: How did you discover that your one sister was still alive?

LS: When I was in Italy, they told me that she was in Stuttgart, so I went there. My wife was there too. I had a brother who survived too. He was in a hospital after the war in the Eastern Zone, the Russian side of Germany. I went back in 1946 and tried to take him back to West Germany but he could not be moved. So I left him and went back to Stuttgart. Then we came to this country, myself and my wife. When my sister came, she told me that my brother had died. He tried to get out of there to Austria and West Germany and he died on the way. He didn't make it. He was a victim also from the Nazis.

- MS: Had you ever considered returning to Poland, before you came to this country?
- LS: To live? No. I had no desire because we had nobody there. We had no ties in Poland. At least I didn't have any desire.
- MS: Had you ever thought of going to Isreal after the war?
- LS: We were in Isreal once.
- MS: You were?
- LS: Yes, we were there in 1972.
- MS: But not to live?
- LS: No, we went for a visit in 1972. We went for a visit in Isreal.
- MS: A lot of Gentiles in Europe claimed that they did not know what was happening to the Jews.
- LS: That's not true. They knew.
- MS: Well, if you yourself were aware through the newspapers and that . . .
- LS: That's not true. The people claimed they did not know. I would say that they are illiterate, ignorant people. Intelligent ones knew what went on. I'm not saying all Gentiles were bad. I'm not saying that, but today everybody knew what went on. Maybe a child would not know, but a mature person knew what went on. They knew.
- MS: Why do you feel that you survived and most of the others didn't?
- LS: Well, I don't know why. This is a tough question. If a person believes in God, he would say that it is God's will. If a person who doesn't believe in God survived, he would say that it was luck or just circumstances. He was strong enough to survive. Who knows? Who has the answers? It's a mystery. It is a matter of interpretation. How do I personally feel about why I survived? I don't know, to be honest about it.
- MS: When did you run into the woman again who was going to be your wife?
- LS: She was my wife before I was sent away.
- MS: You were married before?

- LS: Yes. We got married in 1942, June 15th. My parents were sitting there and her parents were still alive. Like I mentioned before, we were neighbors across the street.
- MS: I didn't realize that you had been married. When you were separated from your family you were separated from your wife as well?
- LS: That's right.
- MS: It wasn't until you were in Italy that you learned that she was still alive. Do you have any feelings of bitterness towards your homeland?
- LS: Towards who?
- MS: Europe, Poland.
- LS: I don't know? I have mixed emotions. It's a bit against home.
- MS: Let's say against your neighbors, the Gentile neighbors, who had to be aware of what was happening and really did not come to your aid.
- LS: No, I am not bitter. I will tell you why I am not bitter, because I feel, I don't know . . . I made up my mind when I came to this country that I would never be bitter. I remember. It hurts. To say I am bitter, to hate and go and kill somebody, I'm not that bitter. I wouldn't kill anybody. It hurts; I'll have a scar the rest of my life. My family was cremated. To be bitter, I don't know who to be bitter at. If I am to be bitter it's only to be bitter at the system, the Nazi system, who established the machinery.
- MS: You went to Isreal for a visit. Have you ever returned to Poland?
- LS: No.
- MS: You came to this country. Where did you go? How did you get here?
- LS: We first came to Patterson, New Jersey. My dad had a brother. I told you at the beginning, he was a rabbi. He died in 1937. My aunt was alive, so we came. When we were in Stuttgart, they said in the beginning of 1946 they were registering people who wanted to go to the United States or Isreal. We registered, but in order to become eligible they said that you have to have some relatives so they will except you, so that you don't fall on the government's shoulders. We met a lady



in Stuttgart who happened to be a captain and she said, "Young man, where do you want to go?" We told her that we wanted to go to Patterson, New Jersey. She asked who we knew over there. I told her. Of course, I didn't know the exact address, but I did tell her. Fortunately, she happened to be a member of the same congregation; she was of the Jewish faith. She made up the papers and in a month or so we were in the United States. We came over in May of 1946. We came to this country. How did we get to Youngstown? My wife had family here in Youngstown. Also, my wife, has an aunt in Canada and had an uncle in London, Ontario. They got together and they found out about us and they came and picked us up and brought us to Youngstown. That's how I came to Youngstown.

MS: Did you find it easy to begin life again?

LS: What do you mean by easier?

MS: Was it hard for you to adjust to begin again?

LS: It was hard, of course, in the beginning. I did not know the language. I didn't have a job. I wanted to become independent. I didn't want to be on anybody's shoulder; I wanted to be self-sufficient, to take care of myself. It was hard in the beginning. We stayed over at my uncle and aunt's house for about ten weeks. Then we found a place in Youngstown on Market Street. I worked for the same people. We cleaned up an apartment upstairs. It had old tables and chairs. We remodeled--me and my wife--the place and fixed it up. We lived in it for four years, until 1950. Then we moved to our own house in 1950.

MS: Is there anything else you remember that we haven't covered? Any incident that sticks out in your mind?

LS: There were a lot of incidents, bad ones, which I would rather not go into. Like I say, you asked that question, if I am bitter? It hurts, believe me, it hurts. It hurts a lot all of the time. That's the story. If I left something out, like I say, if you interview my wife she might give you more details. I am sure she will give you more details than I did.

MS: Thank you for talking.

LS: You are welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW