

MILLER, Eugene
English
RG-50.030*0585

In this interview, Eugene Miller, born October 16, 1923, tells his experience as Jew in Poland during World War II. He was born in Lodz, Poland to wealthy parents. His family was one of the first families to move into the Lodz ghetto during German occupation of Poland. He worked in the ghetto in the fire department until the ghetto was liquidated in August of 1944, when he was sent to Auschwitz. After four weeks in Auschwitz, he was taken to Dachau where he was soon liberated by Americans. After liberation, he went to Frankfurt where he was able to attend the university there before moving to America and receiving his PhD at University of Chicago.

00:00 – 6:30

The interviewee tells about his parents; states his mother was born in Lithuania and states his father was born in Moscow; explains that boys in Lithuania were drafted to serve in Russian army for 25 years but his grandfather was wealthy and sent his sons to the U.S. and his mother to study in Moscow; explains that she got married during the revolution and lived in communist Russia until 1923 when Lenin decreed that bourgeoisie should be arrested; tells that his grandparents all fled to Poland near the Russian/Romanian boundary and settled in **Lodz**; explains his mother was pregnant with him and went to the border and joined her husband in Poland; tells he was registered as born October 16, 1923 but he was actually born a few days before; says he was the only child of his parents; explains that his family was very well-off because they owned a factory with textiles; remembers being sent to a very expensive gymnasium (high school) in Poland; [shows photograph with him and his mother];

6:30 – 13:31

He remembers growing up and being in gymnasium when the war started; recalls being put in a ghetto with 200,000-250,000 people in Lodz; states his family moved to the ghetto about 2 months earlier since they had a nice apartment in a nice neighborhood, so the Germans requisitioned his apartment for Germans expelled from Russia; remembers the Germans came and told them they had 2 hours to leave and take whatever they could carry; says his family rented a room in the only building with a flushing toilet in the **ghetto**; explains the Germans took his father's business when they came; recalls there were other Jewish kids who went to other gymnasiums and all of them were put together in a school in the part of Lodz near the cemetery **Marysin** and they continued school until 1941; explains that the first gymnasium he went to was Jewish and had teachers mostly with PhD's and was recognized by the Polish government so they didn't need to take; explains they offered two diplomas, one in Polish and one in Hebrew so you could go study in Palestine; tells he spoke Polish at home but his parents spoke Russian amongst themselves; answers that he spoke Polish and Hebrew at school and learned German and English at school; explains that the Jewish community was split into two parts, half Hasidim

who spoke Yiddish; tells he never went into the Hasidic neighborhoods because he didn't speak Yiddish; tells a story of negative interaction with Hasidic community.

13:31 – 22:14

He tells about life in the ghetto as a teenage boy; explains his uncle in Moscow offered to take him in during 1939 and send him to University there; remembers his mother visited Moscow in 1938 and received permission to go but had to have a guide who was likely in the KGB; remembers his father telling him he could go to Russia but then he will never be allowed back; remembers also his father saying that his father will not go back because he already left and the Germans are civilized; recalls when they were given armbands to wear and he told his father he refused to wear it but was recognized by Poles and assaulted; remembers that his parents told him that he could leave if he wanted to so they put gold in his shoes; recalls his mother telling him that he will never see his parents again when he was 15 ½; says he made it to the Russian border and then went back to Lodz; remembers his parents being very happy he came back, by that time everyone was in the ghetto; states that he can speak Yiddish and some German; explains that they closed the ghetto school when he was 17 1/2 in 1941 and at that time they transported German and Czech Jews there; answers that before 1941 it was only Jews from Lodz there; says **Rumkofsky** was already the Jewish leader; remembers Rumkofsky was a widower who was comfortable and on the board of orphanages; says that he thinks Rumkofsky thought that the only way for the ghetto to survive was not only to cooperate with the Germans but to create their own industry in the ghetto; remembers the ghetto industry included shoes, garments, belts; explains his father didn't want to be a part of the ghetto administration; recalls only being able to afford 2kg of bread for one week and maybe a few potatoes; recalls poorer people died off early but Rumkofsky created industry so people would have to work.

22:14 – 31:28

He explains that those who went to school got soup in addition to their bread; tells that his address in the ghetto was **Brunenstrasse 16**; explains he continued his high school education until September of 1941; tells that after school closed he was assigned to the labor department at 17 or 18 years old; remembers he worked in economic department; explains that the teachers at the school were from various Jewish schools around Poland; remembers that Professor **Silverbogen** became principal of this school; says that after school ended he did whatever they asked him to do and probably worked around 10 hours a day; explains the place he worked, **Wirtshaftam**, did administrative work and was created by Rumkofsky; explains he was reassigned to work in court in 1942 mostly dealing with thefts; remembers there were no phones so kids would run notes around the ghetto; explains his job was easy and his cousin had an accounting job for the Wirtshaftam; answers that his father in this time did not work but died slowly of hunger; explains a loaf of bread in 1942 cost over \$100-150; tells you had to work to get stamps for food but his father got stamps for being sick; recalls that the German Jews in the ghetto were not treated well and many committed suicide; tells in may 1943 he was transferred to

the fire department; details job in the fire department as preventative work; gives details of the **Arbeitsresort** as a manufacturing or minor factory area; tells every day they were assigned different jobs.

31:28 – 42:01

He answers that there was a lot of manufacturing of German military supplies, including uniforms, shoes but not weapons; states that Rumkofsky wanted to make himself economically indispensable; answers that there were selections in the Lodz ghetto and that they took people who could work; says the people were taken 200-300 miles from Lodz for experimentations; recalls that people were taken in gas vans; reports hearing rumors about it at the time in 1942; says periodically they'd take people away because they were unable to work; remembers about 100 funerals a day; says his parents died in the ghetto too of hunger; explains that people would put bread in water to make it expand and that would make the person swell; says that by the end of the ghetto he too was swollen and was taken to the hospital where they took one liter of water out of his lungs; tells that his father who was 4-5 years older than his mother died first; remembers his mother telling him that if he survives he has uncles in the U.S. and to try to educate himself; states that his mother died in 1942; explains that he lived by himself in the ghetto after they died; tells that he worked in the fire department until they liquidated the ghetto; explains more details of his duties as fireman; recalls that his father died in her sleep and his mother contracted typhoid and died within two weeks; reports his whole family was in the ghetto with him and they all died; tells story of a cousin who committed suicide after Nazi experiments during liberation; explains that when the ghetto was liquidated he did not want to leave; recalls that people in the ghetto didn't know about **Auschwitz**; explains that the German in charge of the ghetto, **Hans Bieboff**, and Rumkofsky, told people to go with their families to work; recalls that people thought they were going to **Arbeitslag** or work camp; tells that Rumkofsky would gather everyone and ask for old parents and children so the rest of us can survive otherwise the Germans will come and take and there will be bloodshed; tells that no one could leave their houses for days and Rumkofsky and his men would go around to the buildings and select people, usually the elderly.

42:01 – 47:02

He says that when the ghetto was liquidated in August 1944, when he was 21, he was very thin but could walk; remembers the selector, **Mangela**, saying "left" or "right" to decide where you would go; recalls 80-90 being put in a cattle car; tells story of talking to a man who knew his parents on the car and helping the man stand; remembers arriving at **Auschwitz** at night and helping men out of the car; recalls them saying that whoever couldn't walk would go to the Red Cross cars; tells that he tried to help the man from the car but a Russian prisoner stopped him from following that man which saved his life since the man went to the gas chamber; explains passing the selection and staying in Auschwitz from 2-3 weeks and never being tattooed there; remembers that the Russians were getting near them so they wanted to transport the prisoners

closer to Germany to **Dachau**; answers that he didn't know this at the time and found this out after; [shows aerial picture of Birkenau taken by American bombers]; tells that **Birkenau** was for extermination where as Auschwitz was for working and making artificial rubber; answers that he was still in Auschwitz when the American planes flew over; remembers not being afraid of bombs because they never thought they'd live anyway.

47:02 – 56:25

He explains that he went to Dachau and the Jewish prisoners were taken to the Dachau sub camps; remembers carrying back people who died after a day of work so the tally at the end of the day would match; tells he worked building roads; answers he was in Auschwitz for four weeks; explains that in the middle of April he became very sick and transported him to a different sub camp 25 miles from Dachau and thought he wouldn't survive it; tells that when he arrived there, he was put on a train for a few days and most people died by time they came out; tells then they were liberated; answers that he could no longer walk when suddenly some people came up in uniforms and yelled "you are free" and wave an American flag; tells they were throwing the prisoners their military rations; tells story of opening his box of food and getting sick so an old friend asked for it and the next morning the friend died; remembers the next day people coming and telling the soldiers not to give the prisoners food; explains when he was liberated he decided to go back to Poland to check for extended family; tells a story about visiting his Polish neighbor that his mother had left their expensive belongings with; repeats the story that his neighbor told him of what happened to their Polish non-Jewish family during the war; remembers Jewish emissaries from **Palestine** guiding Jews out of Poland so he ended up at **Frankfurt am Main**.

56:25 – 1:07:00

He tells that he and a few friends in a suburb of Frankfurt decided to continue their education; answers that he just wanted to get out of Poland because he felt there was no future there and it was anti-Semitic; tells that he met a few of his classmates who survived; remembers that if you join the Polish police the Poles would forgive you of your past, like your father owning a factory or being bourgeois, and you can go to university; explains he learned of the displaced persons camp outside of Frankfurt in **Sobur, Salzheim**; tells he met other boys his age going; explains that it was 1946 and he realized the no country would admit them to university so soon; tells he wrote letter to **Johann Wolfgang Goethe University (University of Frankfurt)**; says they were very forthcoming and offered them to go for free and asked for his **arbitur**; remembers that they wouldn't admit them without their certificates which they didn't have; tells that they decided to go to headquarters of American army 20 miles north of Frankfurt at **Wiesbaden** and went to the education officer; reports American officer saying that he could get them in to German university with one phone call but in America they would need some sort of certificate; tells that he became the first president of Jewish student union there in 1948 and was with them for 3 years; says that there were eventually 100 students in the union; tells he met his wife who was in nursing school;

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explains he had many credits transfer to the U.S. but they wanted him to take more liberal arts classes; [shows a gold medal awarded to him from the college of pharmacy at **Butler University**];

1:07:00 – 1:12:49

He tells he went to pharmacy school even though they told him not to in the U.S.; explains he decided to get his masters by working the second shift; tells he moved to Chicago because his wife's family was there; remembers calling **University of Chicago** in the middle of a quarter and was offered a doctoral scholarship; recalls telling them he couldn't accept it because he had a family to support; explains that his wife got a job so he could go to school and get his PhD in pharmacology at University of Chicago; tells that one day the Food and Drug Administration gave a lecture in the 1960s and he met them; accepts a job with FDA; [shows photographs of teaching at the lab at University of Chicago and with his family]

Track 2

00:00 – 09:25

He returns to the story of his education first in Frankfurt, then Butler college, then University of Chicago; he details his educational accomplishments; explains career research in pharmacology including different positions and types of research; explains when he came to America he didn't want to forget what happened, but to not have nightmares; tells he worked a lot and did whatever he could to stay busy; explain he worked at **B'nai B'rith** and lists different tasks he did; tells story of seeing a friend's father after liberation and going to talk to him a day later and finding him dead; reports the success of his children today; says his children know what he's been through; answers that he has told them this story but it's hard for them to understand their father went through it.

09:25 – 17:36

He explains his wife had a different experience because she is five years younger and lived on the Russian side in Ukraine; details his wife's experience and her family history and how her family survived in the woods; says his wife was saved and hid by her gentile maid; claims his wife eventually received some money from Germany; explains when the Russians liberated her father from sleeping in the woods they sent him to the army until they realized he was not fit for that and set him to be an accountant in Siberia; tells that his family was eventually reunited; explains that his wife wanted to go back to their village that was near **Lubnow** but when she went back her house was bombed; tells that neighbors told his wife that there were Jewish survivors around; repeats a story of his wife where a priest told her that because she didn't look Jewish, if no survivors claimed her she'd be raised catholic; explains his wife reunited with her family and he met her in Frankfurt and married in 1948; answers that he does not regret going

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back from the Russian border because he was his parents only child; [shows a picture of a reunion vacation to Boca Raton, FL and cruise in 1997 with 60-70 people]