

Louisa: Today is February 6, 1991. This is Louisa Weinrib talking with Eliakim Stencel in his home. Mr. Stencel, we are talking with you today because we understand that your family fled the Nazis. Would you start telling your story, first of all, by what is your date of birth? And where were you born?

Mr. Stencel: I was born in Poland. October 20, 1906 in Rypin.

(PAUSE, as Mr. Stencel writes the spelling of Rypin.)

Louisa: You were born in Rypin, in Poland.

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: How big is Rypin. What was the population?

Mr. Stencel: Small town. About 500 Jewish people. 500 families. The town, I think, was about 20,000.

Louisa: What part of Poland was that in?

Mr. Stencel: My town, Rypin, was 15 kilometers from the German border. Very short, you know.

Louisa: What was the nature of the Jewish community? Was it Orthodox? Conservative?

Mr. Stencel: There was one synagogue, a big one. Orthodox was small, separate. Was two...like here (in Montgomery) there is three. Over there was two: Orthodox and other kind.

Louisa: Tell me about your family. How long had they lived in Rypin?

Mr. Stencel: My family, as I know, was there a few generations.

Louisa: How big was your family? Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Stencel: We have nine before the War starts. Was my father, my mother, and seven children. Five boys, two girls.

Louisa: All in your family! Did grandparents live with you?

Mr. Stencel: No, they lived separate. Other places. Same town, other houses.

Louisa: Did you have aunts, uncles and cousins in Rypin also?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. Like my father's brothers were a few, like about six brothers and three sisters.

Louisa: What about your mother's family?

Mr. Stencel: My mother's family was none in our town. They were living 20 kilometers away in another town, Dobshin.

Louisa: Did you have a very close family? Did you spend holidays together? Celebrations together? Visit a lot? Go on picnics?

Mr. Stencel: Yes, on Saturdays Every Saturday.

Louisa: What was the level of your education in Poland?

Mr. Stencel: Not much. Not many colleges like here.

Louisa: Was it difficult for a Jewish child to get an education?

Mr. Stencel: No. It was like here. If they have it, they go to college!

Louisa: What about public schools?

Mr. Stencel: In my town I know one man who went to college. One Jewish man.

Louisa: What about school for younger children? High school. Elementary school?

Mr. Stencel: My wife had a kindergarten, for Hebrew education. Nothing in Polish. The children were speaking Polish, and she taught them Hebrew. They played while the parents worked. She taught them until 5 o'clock.

Louisa: It was like day care and kindergarten together?

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: Was your education primarily within the Jewish community, or did you go to school with other Polish children?

Mr. Stencel: First, in my town was one school. They teach Polish, you see? There were two Jewish teachers. My wife's sister was one teacher. Two in the whole school.

Louisa: Was this just for the Jewish children?

Mr. Stencel: No. This was for the whole town. The elementary school to eighth grade. Later was like gymnasium. Gymnasium was eight classes. If you finished eight, you went to college. Like here is twelve (grades). There is eight.

Louisa: So, did you go to school there all eight years?

Mr. Stencel: No. I went when I was little. My father was a religious man. He sent me to a ... they call it a Rabbi, now. He was teaching us just Hebrew and religious things. Later I went to Hebrew School, "Htchya" (writes down the spelling). They were teaching Polish over there.

Louisa: Did your father teach this Hebrew school?

Mr. Stencel: No, my father was a business man. He had a hardware store.

Louisa: Did your mother work in the hardware store?

Mr. Stencel: She helped. Not all the time, unless there was a sale.

Louisa: You said your father was very religious...

Mr. Stencel: No. If he would be very religious, he would not send me to Hebrew school. Jewish religious school.

Louisa: (Is puzzled) Describe the religious observation in your family. Did you celebrate holidays? Jewish holidays?

Mr. Stencel: We celebrated every Jewish holiday.

Louisa: Did you have a Sabbath dinner in your home?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. Every Saturday. Friday night meal, Saturday morning.

Louisa: Were you Bar Mitzvah (religious ceremony for thirteen-year old boy)?

Mr. Stencel: There was not a religious school rabbi, but he taught us. I stayed the thirteen years. I went to the synagogue, and was saying some prayers. That's it. We went home, and we had a big meal with guests. (This is not quite clear.)

Louisa: What language did you and your family speak in your home?

Mr. Stencel: Jewish.

Louisa: Is that Yiddish?

Mr. Stencel: Yiddish, yes.

Louisa: Did all the Jewish people in the town speak Yiddish?

Mr. Stencel: All the Jewish people. Yes. In business is (speaking) Polish.

Louisa: So the town around you spoke Polish, and the Jewish people in the town spoke Yiddish.

Mr. Stencel: In the home. In the home we spoke Jewish. Like in Israel, Hebrew; here, English. There, Jewish.

Louisa: What did you and your family do for fun? For recreation?

Mr. Stencel: My wife's sister, she had a movie theater. They had a business and run movies. The biggest days were Friday, Saturday, Sunday. It was a big company. Polish people and Jewish people, the whole town, would like movies, and went. It was some movie theater!

Louisa: And that belonged to your wife's family?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. My wife's family.

Louisa: So your wife lived in your same town.

Mr. Stencel: She went to school and I went to school. I knew her since a little girl grow up.

Louisa: You were married there before you left Poland? Or later?

Mr. Stencel: No, I married in 1937.

Louisa: OK. Let's don't skip ahead yet.

What was the relationship in Rypin between the Jews and the non-Jews?

Mr. Stencel: Very good.

Louisa: Very good. Always?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. 100% of businesses was in Jewish hands. All stores. All people who worked as dressmakers for ladies, caps...everything was in Jewish hands.

Louisa: I see. Did you have friends who were Christian?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. They were all friends.

Louisa: What are your happiest memories of life growing up as a child?

Mr. Stencel: We were happy. All Jewish holidays. We weren't religious too much. I was with Christian friends, Jewish friends. A lot of friends in our town were Christian, and when the Germans come in, they helped them (the Jews) not get killed. You see...like my father was killed.

Louisa: When did you first start to worry about Hitler?

Mr. Stencel: 1933.

Louisa: What happened that year?

Mr. Stencel: The German Jews start suffering, I'd say. Another year Hitler shouting on the radio, and talking Polish. He was saying to Polish government to prepare for a war, to start checking all the war things. Like planes and everything. To check these, to fix everything to be ready. These were German people. From Germany to the Polish people. The Polish government started doing what they say. And when the war started, they were ready. They made ready for the Germans, you see!

Louisa: So the Germans sent their agents into Poland to tell them to get ready?

Mr. Stencel: No, they told on the radio. In Polish from Germany, to tell the government to try to be ready for the war. To take apart all planes, mechanical things. And when the War start, the Germans came in like nothing! They were killed. They couldn't fight, you see? So they did it. And to hate the Jewish people.

Louisa: The Germans taught the Poles to hate the Jewish people?

Mr. Stencel: The Germans talked to the Polish people to hate the Jewish people. Yes. They made a message for Poland. They did it.

Louisa: What sorts of things did you witness? What did you see happening?

Mr. Stencel: You could see the change a little. They did not kill.

Louisa: How did their hate take form? What did they do? did they break window? Did they march? Did they have signs?

Mr. Stencel: Sometimes they stopped by my father's store, with two horses, big men. Stopped, standing by the door, to stop people from going in because it was a Jewish store. He didn't care; he didn't think to be disturbed. This was late, that the German's start doing it.

Louisa: They took horses and tried to have a boycott, is that right?

Mr. Stencel: No. They were standing by the doors of the stores. All stores was Jewish. Told the Polish people, "Don't go in; it is a Jewish business."

Louisa: Anything else? Any other events you saw happening as the hatred grew?

Mr. Stencel: That kind of stuff. All Polish people lost 90% because the Jewish people died. Later there was a change. They didn't buy the clothes because they didn't have the stores.

Louisa: Tell us now what happened to your father.

Mr. Stencel: They start in 1939, the first of August, the Germans came in to Danzig. My hometown was 15 Kilometers, 7 miles from the border.

Louisa: So the Germans came in August 1st to Poland, and what happened to your father when they came in?

Mr. Stencel: When they came in they start the first day, two days, you know, calling in all Jewish people to a park to give us work. They ask who feels they cannot work because he is sick, they put his name and address, and later they come in the afternoon, they took him and shot him.

Louisa: All people who were sick?

Mr. Stencel: They were sick. I wanted to go out too, so somebody told me "Don't go. If you will go to this, you will never come back."

Louisa: You were 36 by that time.

Mr. Stencel: Yes. They didn't know, you see. I went to Germany over the years. I helped out in the store to go buy merchandise, because in other Polish towns they didn't make what they made in Germany. So I had to go.

Louisa: You went on buying trips to Germany.

Mr. Stencel: This (points to picture) was my older brother. He was writing, and later he went to Israel, I took over.

Louisa: You said you had seven brothers and sisters. Where were you in the seven.

Mr. Stencel: I was the second to the oldest. Do want to see the pictures?

Louisa: Sure. Let's do it later.

Mr. Stencel: My brother was an artist. My father got something from the same (talent gene!), and my younger brothers the same, and my daughter has started a little (to paint). She is second generation.

Louisa: So artistic talent runs in your family!

Mr. Stencel: And I came here to the United States because I got a job here for painting. They sent for me for painting, but I hadn't got (a job painting), but I got a job at Solomon Brothers.

Louisa: Tell me about your father now. Did he go to the field? When they called for people who could not work to go to the field, did your father go?

Mr. Stencel: My father went there too. All the men didn't know. They asked me to come to the park to stand in the lines and sent people here and there to work.

Louisa: So they got the people who couldn't work and the people who could work.

Mr. Stencel: Yes. And the people who couldn't work they just killed them right away.

Louisa: Right just there? Somewhere else?

Mr. Stencel: No. Not there. They come to his house later, after work and took him away.

Louisa: And so your father...

Mr. Stencel: My father, not because he didn't work, but because he was not a poor man. He had some riches. He had the hardware store, and they needed some thing. Only they didn't take away the business. Four Jewish stores they didn't take away the business! Just my father.

Louisa: But your father left his business to go to work with this group, he thought.

Mr. Stencel: Yes. My mother was in the store. There were four stores left over. The others the Germans closed.

Louisa: Why did your father volunteer to go work with the group, when he could have stayed and worked in his store?

Mr. Stencel: Because they called him. The Germans called him. All men. Not children.

Louisa: Do you know where he went? Do you know where they took him?

Mr. Stencel: No. I did not stay with him. Maybe a hard job. I did not have a hard job. They sent me some where to clean out.

Louisa: Oh, so you went with this group of men, too?

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: Where did you go?

Mr. Stencel: I went some place. Everything was for Nazi Germany, you see?  
Go clean out here.

Louisa: So you were not sent to a labor camp?

Mr. Stencel: No. They used us because they had in mind to kill all the Jewish people. In the beginning it's start work here, later they send away more than one place to get ready the killing places. The camps, you know.

Louisa: Like Theresienstadt.

Mr. Stencel: (Doesn't understand) Concentration camps, where they burn the people. They kill them. They poison them, you know.

Louisa: But you never went to one of those.

Mr. Stencel: No,no. Only one night, maybe two weeks after they come in, I was sleeping. I was married at that time. I was living in the next house from my father. I had the doors closed for the night. You close the windows and not show the light. I come out in the morning. They had come for my father in the night, and took him to the police. We had to bring him food to eat everyday; three times a day we took him something to eat. The first few days we had to wait for the dishes to take them back; took a long time. Lately, right away they give back the dishes. One German policeman, not from our town, only his parents were living in Poland, told us my father is not living anymore. Later we found out they took 'em in the woods

(END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A)

Tape 1, Side B

Louisa: You were talking about you learned that your father was taken to the woods and shot.

Mr. Stencel: Yes. I have pictures here they send me from Poland.

Louisa: Who sent you?



Mr. Stencel: My younger brother was a few times in Poland, lately. He will go this year too. (PAUSE while he looks through pictures and papers.)

Louisa: We just stopped to look at a book where his father's arrest is documented, and there is also a picture of his sister. (The book lists Rypin citizens who were victims of the Nazis.)

When you learned your father was shot, you told me that a German officer advised your family to get out.

Mr. Stencel: (Nods yes) So we rented two horses. We did not have too many trucks like here, you see. And we packed everything that we could.

Louisa: On two horses?

Mr. Stencel: On a wagon with two horses and we went to go to Russia. On the road some other German people stopped us and they say, "Why you take this little boy? What a cute boy." He was three years. And we went to the Russian border. We were waiting for everybody at the border. The German people told us to stay here. The Russians came from the other side and took us to Russia.

Louisa: Who was "we"? How many people went in your wagon?

Mr. Stencel: My mother, me, second brother...4 boys and a girl. One brother was in Israel and 1 girl stayed. My wife and child.

Louisa: How long did it take to get to the Russian border?

Mr. Stencel: Not long. Over night. All day. We left early in the morning, maybe four o'clock in the morning. I think the second day, maybe. About 50 kilometers. Not far.

Louisa: What town did you enter Russia?

Mr. Stencel: Baranovich. A Jewish city.

Louisa: Did you see a lot of military people along the way? A lot of soldiers?

Mr. Stencel: Just one time.

Louisa: But nobody bothered you?

Mr. Stencel: They didn't bother us.

Louisa: Were you able to take some family treasures with you? Pictures or silver?

Mr. Stencel: No.

Louisa: Took nothing?

Mr. Stencel: No.

Louisa: Just left everything behind?

Mr. Stencel: We left most everything. We could take money, clothing, food, everything to sleep, pillows.

Louisa: You were able to take money, did you say?

Mr. Stencel: We hid some money.

Louisa: About how much?

Mr. Stencel: (Shrugs) I had a job over there. Ice skating. (He described something that sounded like ice skates rental.)

Louisa: So you got a job helping with ice skating in Russia?

Mr. Stencel: No was Poland. The Russians took it away. Baranovich was Poland. Poland before the Germans came in. The Russians took away. This was White Russia. The Germans took their part near their border, and the Russians in the East took their part.

Louisa: Tell me about friendly Christians who helped Jews, back in Rypin. Tell me about Józef Kolaszynsky. Tell me about him. (See picture, accompanying this transcript)

Mr. Stencel: His family had a shop that sold pig's meat. It is not allowed for Jewish people. He was a soccer player, their son. Later they found out after the War, that's when we come back, that the Israel government invited him.

Louisa: The Israeli government honored him for having saved many Jews?

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: Did he suffer as a consequence? Was he arrested?

Mr. Stencel: No. He did this and the Germans didn't know. They didn't believe that he helps (Jews).

Louisa: Anybody else that you know about?

Mr. Stencel: Nobody special. Just about him (Mr. Kolaszynsky), and after the War, Israel invited him.

Louisa: How long did your family stay in Russia?

Mr. Stencel: They stayed from September 1939 til '46.

Louisa: Until '46!

Mr. Stencel: Until '46. Six years I was in Russia!

Louisa: Did you stay in Baranovich all the time?

Mr. Stencel: No. We stayed in Baranovich until 1941. The Russian government asked us did we want to go back home, and if we won't go they take our passports. My sisters, they stayed; so they sent them to small towns someplace. Not big towns. And us...they come in the night; they took us away.

Louisa: The Russians did?

Mr. Stencel: The Russians. To a camp far, far away.

Louisa: Far away where?

Mr. Stencel: Somewhere in the Ural Mountains. When the War started in 1941, they didn't believe us that we didn't want to go back home. We don't like Germany. The Russians didn't believe us, so they took us to the Ural. Later when the War starts, they take us more deeper into Russia. They took us to Uzbekistan. My daughter was born over there, in Zyrabulak (Uzbekistan), and my mother died there.

Louisa: How long did you stay there, in Uzbekistan?

Mr. Stencel: We stayed there until we left, in '46.

Louisa: So you were there 4 or 5 years in Uzbekistan.

Mr. Stencel: Four years.

Louisa: And you and your wife and some of your extended family...

Mr. Stencel: Yes...and one brother died there, because he was sleeping on the street.

Louisa: Oh. You had no shelter? No home?

Mr. Stencel: No we didn't have. Sleeping in the street with the clothing we had to cover us, you know. Over there Uzbekistan is hot country, south Russia. Like here in the south United States, it is warm here. So is Uzbekistan.

Louisa: So you stayed there all that time and had no apartment, no home?

Mr. Stencel: <sup>Later,</sup> ~~We~~ tried an apartment. My son was catching cold. He was at that time 3 years, and he got measles, and he died.

Louisa: Your son died of measles?

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: Because you had no good care, is that right?

Mr. Stencel: My son's name was Mark, we called him "Marechek".

Louisa: Did you find work in the Urals and in Uzbekistan?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. First I was in a camp by a lake. They they give us houses for our family. I worked there painting and doing things. They wanted to give work to women too, so they dig roots, to pick up the different kinds of (he struggles to remember the name)...like Ocean Spray...

Louisa: Oh, cranberries?

Mr. Stencel: Yes, cranberries. They give us something to eat for this. My wife wanted to have her job, because she was a kindergarten teacher. She didn't have any pictures. Only in the same camp there was a girl, and she had the pictures from the kindergarten! The Russian commandant, he said, "If you bring us something to show that you were working there", because the other woman was from our same town, "she will have the job." I have the picture here. So she gave my wife the pictures. The commandant, his name was Zakarov, and she got the job.

Louisa: Good!

Mr. Stencel: She got the job! (Smiles) So she was teaching. And she was teaching in Austria, too, in the camp in Austria.

Louisa: So where you lived was an organized camp for refugees in Russia?

Mr. Stencel: It was a special camp. We come there it was, I think, July. They told us, here is very cold in wintertime, so prepare your potatoes. Go to the roots when it is warm, cut the roots when it was warm outside, so you won't go outside for roots (when it is cold). They were not bad! They were better for us than for their(own people).

Louisa: They were better for you than for their own people?

Mr. Stencel: Better for us than for their own. So we prepared. We did this other thing. We worked; they gave us money. Every few days across to the office, they give us money.

Louisa: Was this in the Urals?

Mr. Stencel: (After a period of confusion)...Yes, this was Uzbekistan, and after that we came to here. No...to Poland. They wouldn't send us out. We saw something written up that the Polish government in London, saying "all Polish citizens that they took away from us, after the War, can come right back."

Louisa: So, in 1946 you got invited back?

Mr. Stencel: Back to Poland from anyplace where we come. The Polish government asked from Russia, to send back all Polish people to Poland.

Louisa: You said something about London. Was this the Polish government in exile?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. In exile. Yes, all the years. The Germans took away, and the Polish government went to London.

Louisa: And then they came back?

Mr. Stencel: (yes)

Louisa: And your family went from Uzbekistan back...?

Mr. Stencel: From Uzbekistan back to Poland on a freight train, not a passenger train! Through the night back to Poland.

Louisa: Back to Rypin?

Mr. Stencel: No.

Louisa: Where did you go?

Mr. Stencel: We went to Łódź, it's a big town in Poland. L-ó-d-z.

Louisa: Yes, I have heard of that town. Why did you go there?

Mr. Stencel: Because it is bigger.

Louisa: Did you know any people who lived there? Did you have family?

Mr. Stencel: We did not have family there. We didn't stay long. We went

to Rypin. We went to Rypin because we had a house over there. We sold this house because I didn't believe we would come back here. We sold our house.

Louisa: You mean your house was still there.

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: Were any of your belongings still there?

Mr. Stencel: They didn't take much in a little town. Oh, maybe they took a few bowls to scare people, you know? So we went from Uzbekistan to Poland, to Łódź. Łódź, I went to Rypin. To dig out something; we buried some money over there, and we find. And we sold the house. They give us nothing, you know. This man, he gave us gold money. Russian gold money. Before the War Russian gold money. The Russian occupied Poland long years until 1919. You know 1918 the War ended, they give us Poland. Germans give us.

Louisa: What about the hardware store. Was it still there?

Mr. Stencel: No. The man who was there, he changed it.

Louisa: While your family was going from one place to another for years, one city to another city to another city, were you frightened? Were you afraid?

Mr. Stencel: No.

Louisa: Your family together moving all the time, was not afraid? Why?

Mr. Stencel: Why should I be afraid? For seven years they were good to us. Because the government took us everywhere, not private people somewhere. The government was good to us.

Louisa: You lost so many members of your family.

Mr. Stencel: (Misunderstood meaning of "lost") This happened, I couldn't find right away. We came to Samarkand, one of the biggest towns in Uzbekistan. And over there my daughter (was born). Zyrabulak was a small town. (He writes the correct spelling.) Samarkand was a big town and I was lost in this town. I came to buy something in the railroad place. It is the same state, like Kazakhstan. The baby died in Samarkand, my brother died, same thing, in Samarkand. We were sleeping in the street. We woke up, he was dead. The government sent somebody to bury the people. I took him to a Jewish cemetery, and somebody helped me.

Louisa: You were losing a lot of members of your family, so even though you were comfortable...

Mr. Stencel: My mother died in Uzbekistan. She died in Zyrabulak. She was sick, and we didn't have medicines, so couldn't help. So she died and we buried her there in 1942. (Mr. Stencel describes with difficulty how he made a headstone for his mother inscribed with her name and dates from ceramics and other household goods.) I made my mothers name and year. She died in '42.

Louisa: You mean on a headstone in a cemetery, or on the coffin.

Mr. Stencel: In the cemetery, yes.

Louisa: Do you have any particular memories that you would like to record, about your journey during the War period? For example: did the War touch you in the Urals or where you were? Did you have any experience with the Russian military defending its territory, or advancing? Were you touched by the War?

Mr. Stencel: No. We did not have to be in a big town. We had to go in a small town. For this reason: we went to one big town, Tashkent, and Samarkand, a big town, but I had to go to small towns because they didn't trust us still to be near their government. All the time small places.

Louisa: There were a group of people from Poland with you, is that right?

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: Did you mix with the native population in Uzbekistan or in the Urals? Or did you live separate?

Mr. Stencel: We lived separate.

Louisa: Tell me now about when you left Rypin for the last time. Where did you go from Rypin, after the War?

Mr. Stencel: From Rypin...I went to sell the house from Łódź. I sold the house, we went back to Łódź. It's a big town, you know. A lot of Jewish people, and they helped us. We wanted to go to Austria. We had to go to Czechoslovakia, and later they gave us a train, passenger train, and we went to Vienna. We were living in a small town, and from Vienna we went to Hallein.

END OF TAPE 1

Louisa: You went from Vienna to...

Mr. Stencel: Vienna to Hallein. This was a camp, a German camp. I don't know, they didn't trust it...we went to Ebense. Ebense camp, a German camp, you know, they are killing people over there. The Jewish people they didn't want to stay in these camp in Austria, you know. So they sent us to Ebense camp. We won't stay there, you see?

Louisa: They wanted you to go to what used to be a concentration camp? To stay?

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: Who wanted you to go there? The Austrian government?

Mr. Stencel: The Austrians sent us. So later when we come to this camp, it was horrible to see. We won't stay, so they took us to Hallein.

Louisa: Was Hallein a camp also?

Mr. Stencel: It was a camp.

Louisa: A concentration camp?

Mr. Stencel: It looked better, you see. Over there was violent, you know. Nothing. We say why do we have to stay in a camp where they were killing people, you know?

Louisa: How long had they wanted you to stay there?

Mr. Stencel: Until we get out from here.

Louisa: So Austria was a transit point?

Mr. Stencel: Austria was a transit camp. I was in Austria four years, '46 til 1950.

Louisa: Oh! So it wasn't temporary. It was sort of permanent.

Mr. Stencel: Permanent, sure. Austria was the best to go from Poland.

Louisa: Did you have trouble crossing the Czech border, and the Hungarian border, and the Austrian border?

Mr. Stencel: No everything was easy. Just Czechoslovakia to Austria.

Louisa: So you went at night and didn't have a border problem.

Mr. Stencel: At night. We didn't have a border problem.



Louisa: How many people were with you? Your wife?

Mr. Stencel: That time was me, my wife...(thinks)...my brother and his wife went to Germany after the War, and we went to Austria. We were living in this camp four years until 1950. I can't remember about my brother and his wife. I think he was in Hallein. This whole thing was United States Jewish people help(ing) us. They paid for the trains and everything.

Louisa: So this was an American-sponsored refugee camp?

Mr. Stencel: Yes, refugee camp. Whole thing. The night to go, you see. The trains. They paid. They feed us too.

Louisa: So this was sponsored by American Jewish charities. Were some of the people going to Israel?

Mr. Stencel: From my family? No. The only people in Israel were my older brother, who left Poland when I was a young boy. Later he took my younger sister and my younger brother. So we paid for these things. They went to Italy. Italy by ship to Israel.

Louisa: Before the War?

Mr. Stencel: Before the War. Yes. My sister came back, but my younger brother stayed over there. So I had two brothers (in Israel), the oldest and the youngest.

So when we come to Austria, the government there, they offered us sewing machines, to work. They paid us, not with money. They paid us with food. So, it is good that people worked. They learned something to do. Like I was there and I took jewelry repairs.

Louisa: You learned how to repair jewelry.

Mr. Stencel: An Austrian came every night and teach us. They teach the rabbis who was more religious. (I think he means that a rabbi came to teach the more religious people.) A lot of things to do. I was the manager for the ladies' sewing. I have some old pictures.

Louisa: I'd love to see your pictures.

Mr. Stencel: Later after four years, the United States government where we wanted to go. I got an invitation from Montgomery. I asked the American people over there, when I went to the consul. Where is...what is Alabama? He say, "It's hot over there!" (both laugh) It's hot!

Louisa: So, you were invited to come to Montgomery? By whom?

Mr. Stencel: I don't know here. The (Jewish) Federation. So I know I have a good friend to start here. My brother went to Germany. My sister went to France.

Louisa: All under different sponsorship?

Mr. Stencel: Different sponsorship. I took the United States. They called us "painter". I was making signs.

Louisa: In Montgomery?

Mr. Stencel: When I came here, I didn't have a job. I went to Solomon Brothers to work.

Louisa: What kind of business was Solomon Brothers?

Mr. Stencel: This was wholesale dry goods. (Gets up to get a company picture.)

Louisa: Oh! Down on Commerce Street? (recognizes the ornate architecture)

Mr. Stencel: Commerce Street. They took away the whole street to build the Civic Center. This was on one corner, and maybe 10 buildings they took away to the other corner. You see?

Louisa: Yes. Who owned that building?

Mr. Stencel: Mike Mohr. Did you know Mike Mohr?

Louisa: Yes. Did he own that business?

Mr. Stencel: He was Vice-President. (Points to another man) He was the president and owner. (Thumbs through other pictures.)

Louisa: I'd like to look at that later. So you came from Hallein in Austria to Montgomery directly?

Mr. Stencel: I went to New Orleans.

Louisa: You came by way of New Orleans?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. We went on the ship "General Taylor". The Government gave us. From Hallein we went to Germany to the port.

Louisa: To Hamburg?

Mr. Stencel: Not Hamburg.

Louisa: Bremen?

Mr. Stencel: I think it was Bremen. Hamburg is the biggest German port. This is Bremen. The ship took two weeks! (Laughs) Full steam. My wife with the children. I forgot to say my son was born in Austria, in Salzburg, a big town. My wife and the two children were on another floor. I was "F". (Indicates with his hands the deck levels of the ship with "A" being the highest.)

Louisa: You were way below water level! So you were two weeks...

Mr. Stencel: I could see something by coming out in daytime.

Louisa: Were there other immigrants with you?

Mr. Stencel: Oh...full! Full ship!

Louisa: Everyone being sponsored in a different city?

Mr. Stencel: Most were sponsored from the United States.

Louisa: And you went directly to New Orleans?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. From Bremen to New Orleans. In New Orleans I think we stayed overnight, and later we stayed a day over there. They gave us \$20, when we come to Montgomery. We came into Montgomery early in the morning, and they already had an apartment for us with everything. Dr. Joseph Weinrib was our doctor (father-in-law of interviewer). We were living where he used to have his office on Court Street (529 So. Court St.). It was a big building. (He demonstrates that Mildred Street came in perpendicularly to Court) Two houses into Mildred...here was a German woman doctor (Dr. Bueresch) in a brick building she built...in the second house I was living. Dr. Joseph Weinrib was our doctor.

Louisa: You were on Mildred Street. I didn't know that. So that is where you lived when you came here.

Mr. Stencel: I was living here til...I was working for Solomon Brothers ten years. They closed the business. They didn't have business, so I went to Steiner-Loebman across the street. Here was Solomon Brothers, here was the street, and here was across the street Steiner-Loebman. I worked for Steiner-Loebman maybe three months, and it was before Christmas. Aronov found out I was looking for a job, and says you have the job with me.

Louisa: Who was this?

Mr. Stencel: Hilly Aronov. Hilliard. I worked for him fifteen years, til he died.

Louisa: What did you do for him?

Mr. Stencel: I was manager over there. He didn't trust nobody over there. I worked over there, the whole building. The people. "This is yours." Fifteen years. If he wouldn't die, I would still be working for him. He wouldn't let me go. He came to Steiner-Loebman and said, "January 1st you go over there, to me." I didn't work too long for them, didn't get paid. So I worked for him.

Louisa: When you came to the U.S., did you try to become an American fast, or did you try to keep your Polish identity?

Mr. Stencel: What do you mean?

Louisa: Did you make an effort to keep your European culture in your family, the language, customs, or did you make an effort to assimilate as an American?

Mr. Stencel: I wanted to be like an American. We didn't know the language.

Louisa: You did not know English.

Mr. Stencel: No. Nothing. And my wife didn't know (English). She was at home and I went to work. Somebody taught us from our temple, Irving Winter.

Louisa: Irving Winter? He taught you English?

Mr. Stencel: Yes. He come to my house and teach me English. There was a rabbi on Sayre Street from Etz Ahayem, the Spanish (Sephardic synagogue), later he taught me. Their temple was at that time over there.

I worked over there at Solomon Brothers. Other people were working there twenty years, they couldn't take over. And I didn't go to school here. I didn't go to school and I could do better in business than the other people!

(Shows pride and amazement)

Louisa: That is amazing! How many languages did you speak at the time you came here?

Mr. Stencel: When I came over here? Hebrew. German, because of the business; I went to Germany to buy (for the hardware store). I didn't care about Russian. When I was there, I used things, was working six years in Samarkand. I'd buy Russian papers and was reading, you know. That's it! And Polish. After five years the counselor asked us questions, did we know certain things, and we got

citizenship.

Louisa: No problem, huh? There's your picture! (They are looking at a picture of employees at Aronov.)

Mr. Stencel: (Indicates a certain man) This man spent 20 years on the floor and he couldn't take over. He didn't know (how), and I took over. He's dead now. And Aronov wouldn't let me go for vacation.

Louisa: You had managerial ability, didn't you?

Mr. Stencel: Yes, because I was in business. I did good!

Louisa: Did your wife have any difficulty learning English?

Mr. Stencel: No. She was in Polish. She talked Polish with the children. My wife was a kindergarten teacher, teaching Hebrew.

Louisa: Did she teach Hebrew here in Montgomery?

Mr. Stencel: No, I have pictures. She teached in Austria. Here she had children in school.

Louisa: How old were your children when you came to Montgomery?

Mr. Stencel: I think Gina start in 6th Grade on Sayre Street. Chilton School. Jack start in kindergarten here. Later Jack started school, same thing, on Sayre Street. We were living on Mildred Street a few years. Later, Hilly Aronov helped me buying this house. He went with me, and I showed him what I saw (house hunting). He say, "Don't take it." He knew what would be later in this section. Later we saw a sign on Commerce Street "For Sale By Owner", so we went in, and he looked and I looked and I liked it, and he liked it. He said to the lady this way, "Listen, you go out and take out the sign. I take the house."

Louisa: Good! That's wonderful! He was a good friend.

Mr. Stencel: Yes. She took it out. She knew him. (He gets a little emotional.) I wanted to borrow money for the house. So he went with me someplace, and in two days I got the money for the house. I paid \$12,000 for this house. It's good. Now I paid \$99.98, including fire insurance, too. So, I would pay \$70 a month. It's good, not much, you see.

Louisa: When you came to Montgomery did you join a temple or synagogue?

Mr. Stencel: I went to the synagogue (Agudath Israel). I didn't go to Beth Or. Because, I don't know, I still feel I was a little Jewish more, and so I decided to go to synagogue. Was on High Street. Later they built this one (on Audubon Road). I didn't like it. It was that time...can't remember the name...they didn't like like him and fired him...ah, Atlas. Rabbi Atlas. We sent the children to Sunday School, and after the first year my daughter comes out. I went for her on Sunday, you know. She said that the Rabbi Atlas told me that "I will have to stay in the same class one more year." I say, "You will not stay more in this grade here." I took her right away and went to Beth Or. Why I took her out? In the children's school, she was good.

So in the fourth grade a Jewish girl was killed on Sayre Street, and her parents give away a silver cup for the best children from the fourth grade.

Louisa: Oh, the Blooms. Jane Bloom is the girl who died.

Mr. Stencel: Yes, the Blooms. Gina was the best in the fourth grade. In the other (Sunday) school Gina wasn't good; she'd have to stay. They fired him, the Rabbi. They didn't like him. He wasn't nice. He was stealing, you know.

Louisa: Oh?

Mr. Stencel: Yes, a lot of things.

Louisa: So, your daughter won the Jane Bloom award.

Mr. Stencel: Yes. So later, the next year, my daughter got the best in the fourth grade. Then she was confirmed, she got the same thing (merit recognition). And in (the other) Sunday School, she is "no good"! We took her out right away! She will not go back more there.

Louisa: So you became Reform at that time.

Mr. Stencel: Yes. I never was very religious. I didn't go too much to services. Here I go just twice a year. Now I can't go because I had an operation on my cataract, and I don't see so good, you see? So I don't go. I park separate for fear of hitting somebody, when I go.

Louisa: Let me ask you, with respect to your religious outlook, did the Holocaust and what happened to the Jews affect your faith in anyway?

Mr. Stencel: (Misunderstands question) You see now what's going on in Israel (during the War with Iraq) my whole family is in Israel. My brothers' grandchildren are growing up, so I am interested and go home at 5:30 to watch the news. In the morning sometimes I stay asleep until 8 or 9 o'clock, and then I can't watch the news. I am interested.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

Tape 2, Side B

Family called Gina, my daughter, about what is going on, and she called me. They called from (Israel) far away, and I don't hear so good, so they called Gina and she called me. I am interested in Israel. I was 5 years back in Israel. My wife was in Paris and in Belgium, Israel.

Louisa: Well, your feelings as a Jew...were your feelings as a Jew or your religious belief in God at all affected by the War or the Holocaust?

Mr. Stencel: No. No.

Louisa: Not at all?

Mr. Stencel: No.

Louisa: Since you have been in America, have you gone back to Poland?

Mr. Stencel: No.

Louisa: You said you went to Israel. Have you travelled in Europe at all?

Mr. Stencel: I was in Jerusalem. Special I didn't go. I went with my older brother some places (in Israel).

Louisa: Other than that have you travelled outside of the U.S.? To Europe?

Mr. Stencel: No. I am not interested. My brother goes to Rypin to find out what happened to the Jews in Rypin and what happened to everything that was Jewish over there, including changes to the cemetery. He found out that they took out all stones and the Polish people took them away. The Polish government is giving them back, and will put them back in the cemetery. The headstones. . There are a lot of pictures about that here.

Louisa: Where does this brother live?

Mr. Stencel: He lives near Tel Aviv. I walked from Tel Aviv to his house, and sometimes I walked from his house to Tel Aviv. His place is in Ramat Gan, the "garden center".

Louisa: This brother is the one who went to Poland to see about the graves.

Mr. Stencel: He is the only one left.

Louisa: Is that your older brother or your younger brother?

Mr. Stencel: Younger. The older one died six or eight weeks back.

Louisa: Oh, really, that recently.

Mr. Stencel: He had a heart attack.

Louisa: Before the War against Iraq your brother died?

Mr. Stencel: One brother died in Russia, he was sick and was sleeping on the street. My son, three years, he died because he was sleeping on the street and caught measles. The measles didn't come out, went in, and he died.

Louisa: I am talking about your brother who died six weeks ago.

Mr. Stencel: It was the older brother in Tel Aviv. My second brother younger than me died last year.

Louisa: Where was he living?

Mr. Stencel: Same thing. In Tel Aviv. They are all living there long years. Not like people who are coming (to Israel) now. (Shows post card) This is the last card from my brother, the oldest brother, who died.

Louisa: Is that written in Hebrew?

Mr. Stencel: No. In Jewish. In Yiddish. (Mr. Stencel reads the card in Yiddish, then translates. It begins "Lovely Brother", acknowledges New Year's greetings received from Mr. Stencel, and mentions his move from his beautiful residence of 60 years to a nursing home.) I have letters from many years.

Louisa: I would like to see those later. While the tape is running, let's discuss some more things. Have you ever received reparations from the German government?



Mr. Stencel: A few dollars, something about \$400. Not because they killed somebody, but because they took away from us lots of things. About \$400. is all.

Louisa: To each member of your family?

Mr. Stencel: Each family in Israel they got. Just in Israel.

Louisa: Did your wife get payments, too?

Mr. Stencel: No. She didn't have a store.

Louisa: So, you got a payment of \$400 for the store and all that....gee.

Have you ever had any problems in Montgomery because of being an immigrant, or having an accent? Has anyone ever acted ugly to you, or strange to you?

Mr. Stencel: No. No.

Louisa: Never? That's great!

When you think back over the War years and what your family went through, who are your heros? Who do you admire most? Family? Neighbors? Government? Who are your personal heros?

Mr. Stencel: I don't see heros. (Laughs)

Louisa: If you had it in your power to create a memorial to victims of the Nazis, what sort of memorial would you like to create?

Mr. Stencel: (Thinks) I don't know. You know they got people Jewish and not Jewish. I heard they killed some priests in our town. In a lot of years they killed priests in their churches. I don't like these things. It was bad. Couldn't be worse. You see, in Spain the Jewish people, same thing, had troubles over there. Some people, if they were Jews, went over to another religion, to Christian, and were living. Not the Germans. Germans didn't care about any religion.

Louisa: So they killed any religion.

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: Do you think there should be a memorial to the victims of the Germans?

Mr. Stencel: I think other countries, Poland, have them built. I don't see here, in Montgomery. About New York, I don't know. Have they built something there? I don't know.

Louisa: Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience or life that I have not asked you?

Mr. Stencel: The United States is good for Israel, for the Jewish people. They help. They help. Now, like the War, you see, Israel would go out to help in the War, only the United States will not let them go. I don't know why, because maybe if they would go and help, it would be better. But here it would not be good, for Bush (laughs).

Louisa: Yes, it is hard to know.

Do you have anything, by way of philosophy, that you would like to say to future generations of people who might listen to your tape?

Mr. Stencel: I don't see that they do right for us, you know? The government is for us, you know. They helped us with everything. I haven't been in a country like here!

Louisa: So you are grateful to the U.S.

Mr. Stencel: Yes.

Louisa: Thank you. This will conclude my questions, Mr. Stencel. Thank you very much for talking with us today.

Mr. Stencel: It's good! (Laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW