

September 2008

Menachem Limor oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, September 21, 2008

Menachem Limor (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

Lea Limor (Interviewee)

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Scholar Commons Citation

Limor, Menachem (Interviewee); Hirsh, Michael (Interviewer); and Limor, Lea (Interviewee), "Menachem Limor oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, September 21, 2008" (2008). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 91.

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Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: C65-00080
Interviewee: Menachem Limor (ML)
Interviewer: Michael Hirsh (MH)
Interview date: September 21, 2008
Interview location: Conducted by telephone
Transcribed by: Kathy Kirkland
Transcription date: November 11, 2009
Audit Edit by: Kimberly Nordon
Audit Edit date: June 15, 2010
Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS
Final Edit date: June 29, 2010

[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

Michael Hirsh: So I have your name on tape, it's Menachem, M-e-n-a-c-h-e-m.

Menachem Limor: That's right.

MH: Limor, L-i-m-o-r.

ML: Right. Also, then my last name was Lipshitz.

MH: Lipshitz, okay. What's your address right now?

ML:...

MH: And your phone—

ML: ...

MH: And your date of birth.

ML: November 3, 1930.

MH: You were in Buchenwald, and you were fourteen years old at the time?

ML: Yeah, when I was liberated. Yes.

MH: How long had you been in there?

ML: About six months or something like this.

MH: And you had come from where?

ML: From Poland, from Częstochowa, from HASAG.

MH: I've actually been to Częstochowa. There's a big Catholic church there.

ML: Yes, Jasna Góra.

MH: And it's right—not far from Auschwitz.

ML: Yeah. Well, I was born in Częstochowa.

MH: Tell me what was happening just before the liberation.

ML: Well, I was over there in the hospital, but not as a—I wasn't sick, but I was working over there because Polish people wanted to help me out: because I was Jewish, and Jews were taken out from the camp before, so they were hiding me in this hospital. And when we heard that—you know, that the Americans were coming—we went on the roof of the hospital, and then I saw American tanks coming from both sides of the camp. A Jeep with American soldiers came into the camp, and that's the first time I saw an American soldier in my life.

MH: How did you know the Americans were coming?

ML: I can't tell—there were rumors, but we saw the Germans were not in their posts, you know, their watch posts, and rumors started to be that they are coming and, you know, everyone expected a good rumor. So, we—that's what we did. We went on the roof of the camp and we saw them, and then the rumors spread, and then the Jeep with American soldiers came in, and that's how we were liberated.

MH: Did you go down and see the soldiers?

ML: Well, I saw them from far away; they didn't come in exactly where the hospital was. But I saw them from far away, yes.

MH: But you didn't go down and talk to them.

ML: Later, not the same day. Later, yes.

MH: Tell me about that. You're a fourteen-year-old boy, and these soldiers really aren't much older than you. They're maybe six or seven years older.

ML: Yes, right.

MH: So, what was that like?

ML: Well, I will tell you. Actually, in the hospital, we didn't have enough supplements for people with some medications and so on, and people in the hospital told me, "No, you, as a young guy, go talk to the soldiers and see if you could get something to help people out in the hospital here." And I went and started with my broken English—I just spoke a little bit English—talked to them, and they gave me, actually, some spirits, you know, that you could disinfect things and so on, and I brought it to the hospital. And I talked with them, and as much as we understood each other. But, you know, they were very friendly, and I was glad to talk to them.

MH: How long did the Americans stay at the camp, those soldiers?

ML: Well, it was a few days, until everything was organized. You know, they started to organize people: Polish people be together, and French people together, and Jewish people be together in groups, and if people wanted to move back to their countries, to Poland or wherever they came from. And it took a while; it's hard to say exactly how long.

MH: When did the SS, Nazis leave the camp? How far before the Americans got there?

ML: Well, to the best of my knowledge, I saw a lot of Germans the day before they left, and there were still some Germans when they come in, because there were even some Germans who wanted to shoot back at American soldiers, and they got caught or killed or whatever. But the last I knew about it was the day before the liberation.

MH: One of the things you read is that Buchenwald was really liberated by the rebellion of 700 or so inmates there.

ML: Well, that's true. It was a surprise for me, because I saw next day, I saw the Russian—Russian soldiers is what was kept over there, and I knew because there was one in the hospital, too, and he was walking with a rifle. I don't know how he got this rifle, from whom, but there were people. Yeah, I know there was some kind of an underground in Buchenwald, because when we knew that, in the hospital, I know they were bringing in some medications, you know, that the Germans didn't supply, but they wanted some people, certain people—inmates—to stay alive. They were brought into the camp illegally, but given to those people. So, I know there was an underground.

And also, we were afraid that maybe the Germans will take everyone out from the camp, and in the hospital, there was a group that say, "We won't go. We will run away," and they had even clothes, you know, not inmate clothes, the civilian clothes. And I was lucky to be with them, that they said they would take me with them if we have to go. We didn't leave, but at least I know that they would help me if there was a need to. So, there was an underground, but I was a young boy, so I wasn't that familiar with it, but I know that there was.

MH: When did you finally leave Buchenwald?

ML: I left Buchenwald, I think, in June or something. You see, my brother was liberated in Poland, and he came to look for me into Buchenwald, and together with him, I left

Buchenwald, and we wanted to leave Europe, so we went to—we look for a place that had a port from which we'd be able to leave Europe, so we went to Hamburg.

MH: How did you get to the United States?

ML: This was already a long time after that. I came to the United States only in 1969.

MH: Where did you go to from Hamburg?

ML: To Israel. I was in the Israeli army, one of the first soldiers in the army. I was injured in one of the fights for Jerusalem. And then my brother came to the United States before me, and then he got injured in a car accident, and he needed some help with his business, so he asked me to come over, and I came over in sixty-nine [1969].

MH: What business were you in?

ML: Iron business.

MH: What kind of business?

ML: Iron business.

MH: Oh, iron.

ML: Yeah, he had a company called Artistic Ironworks.

MH: You stayed in that until you retired?

ML: Yeah, in Nashville, Tennessee.

MH: In Nashville. Were you married in Israel or married here?

ML: Yes, I married in Israel, and I had three children. I came with all my family.

MH: What do you think accounts for the fact that you survived being picked up in Poland and survived Buchenwald?

ML: Well, I think mostly it was luck. I think mostly it was luck, and then, you know, I did the right things without knowing the right things. It's still hard to say.

Lea Limor: I'm his wife, and I went on the phone in case I need to help him, because I know his story already better than he.

MH: (laughs) What is your name?

ML: My name is Lea.

MH: Leah, okay. So, when you said you did the right things even though you didn't know they were the right things, what does that mean?

ML: Well, what that means, say, I was once hidden in a place, and the Germans, still in Poland, and the Germans found the place. And they—we were over there about thirty people, women and children, and the Germans said, "Everybody out," and everybody started to go out, and I decided not to go out. I was over there with a cousin of mine.

LL: Two cousins.

ML: And I stood next to the—it was like a small opening on the bottom of the floor that people had to crawl out. I was standing next to that place, and the Germans put in—said, "Everybody out," and nobody answer, and they left. All the people just went out didn't survive. I did survive. It's not because I was smarter.

LL: They all got out and they all were shot.

ML: It was just, you know, a decision I had to do, and I did it, and it was the right decision.

MH: At that moment, yes. They could have easily dropped a grenade into the hole, too.

ML: Yeah, sure! Or if somebody, if one of them would crawl inside; but Germans were too lazy to crawl inside to check it out, and this was my luck. God helped me or I don't know what.

MH: How did you finally get arrested?

ML: Well, finally—

LL: Not arrested.

ML: I was the ghetto in Poland, and to stay alive, we had to go to work in the ammunition factory in Poland called HASAG. So, I was in working in that ammunition factory, and the day before the liberation of Częstochowa, they took all—I was on the night shift, they took all the night shift and send out to Buchenwald. That's how I went to Buchenwald. And you know, we didn't get arrested. We were just taken.

MH: Have you met many of the American liberators since you came to the United States?

ML: No, because I don't—

LL: Only one—one liberator that lives not far from Nashville.

ML: Because also, you know, there were some people spread all over the United States; maybe some died already.

LL: But there is one liberator that liberated Buchenwald that lives not far from me.

ML: Yeah he knows about it.

MH: That's Harry Snodgrass; I spoke with him.¹ The way he described the camp when he said he got there, there was only one American soldier there. And at Buchenwald, there were hundreds of American soldiers on liberation day.

ML: I really can't give an exact account of it because, as I told you, I was in the hospital, and I didn't go out. They didn't let me go out. First of all, we were afraid to move, because we didn't know what's going on, and you were afraid—I was trying not to be close to them at the time, so—

LL: Two days before, they took up a lot of the people for the March of the Death.

ML: I know that we start to get enough food, because Americans brought us food, and you didn't have to go out every morning where they'd count you and so on. So, it was a different life, no question about that.

MH: I'm trying to figure out if Snodgrass got to the main Buchenwald camp or was it a subcamp where there was only one or two American soldiers there. I was trying to figure out what camp he got to.

ML: Well, I don't know, but it's hard for me to believe there's just one soldier because it was quite a big camp.

LL: You said you saw two columns of tanks.

ML: Yeah, but where they went, I don't know.

MH: I'm going to guess he was at one of the subcamps, even though he doesn't think so.

ML: Because this was a big camp.

MH: There were 30,000 people there.

¹ Harry Snodgrass was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is C65-00129.

ML: Yeah, I was in a barracks, Barracks number 63, but I don't know, maybe 100 or more barracks, and each barracks have probably 500, 600, 800 people in the barracks like this. So, I don't know.

MH: Was your wife in Buchenwald?

LL: No, no, no. I was born actually not in Israel, still in Palestine. But I know the story for many times but sometimes I need to remind him some stuff.

MH: Wives are like that.

ML: Yeah, she's younger than me.

LL: I'm not so young.

MH: What is your phone number again?

ML: ...

MH: I thank you for talking to me. I appreciate it.

LL: You're welcome. Thank you for being interested.

ML: If you write the book, I would be glad to get one.

MH: I will make sure you get one.

LL: Because in November, he'll be seventy-eight and he's—

ML: I will be seventy-eight, yeah.

LL: And he's one of the younger people that's still alive.

MH: I'm aware of that. *L'Shanah Tovah*. Thank you.

LL: *L'Shanah Tovah*. *Chag Same'ach*.

MH: *Chag Same'ach* to you too. Bye-bye.

End of interview