

## ADOLF ENGEL & HIS SOLOTWINA CHILDHOOD

This discussion is taken from a much longer oral history taping by Dr. Samuel Theodore Killian, at Thanksgiving dinner held at the Killian home in Syracuse, New York, 23 November 1967. Transcribed by grandson Ronald Killian.

### TRANSCRIPT CODE

O=Adolph Engel [Opa], husband

B=Bella Hofmann Engel [Nana], wife

R=Regina Mohrer, a sister of Adolph (one of 6 siblings)

T=Samuel Theodore "Ted" Killian, MD

Ren=Renee Engel Killian, Ted's wife and the Engels' only child

Ron=Ronald Killian, son

S= Stephen Killian, son

V=Vicki Killian, daughter [she did not participate in this specific discussion]

[x]=indecipherable language

### FAMILY BACKGROUND

Leo Engel's father came to Solotwina from somewhere in Russia as a widower, date unknown. He met his wife in Solotwina, married her, and stayed there. They supposedly had 4 children: Leo (Leib, a fabric store owner in Solotwina), Jacob (a teacher in government), Heinrich (Henry, an elementary school teacher in a community about 100 miles away), and possibly a daughter who moved to Paris. – This information supplied by Adolph Engel.

Leo Engel born in Solotwina in 1851.

Charlotte Weinberg, Leo's wife, born in Lemberg, date unknown.

Adolf Abraham (changed to Adolph born 10 July 1888 and left with his family for Ludwigshafen, Germany in 1900.

Regina (Malcha Rachel) born 25 December 1890.

Cecilia (Cilli) born 4 April 1883 [though Regina below said that 3 girls were born before Adolf.]

Salcia (Susan or Suse) – birthdate unknown—before 1888.

Rosa – birthdate unknown—before 1888.

Kurt Isaac (changed to Curt) born 1 December 1894.]

[Initial discussion preceded the following talk about life in Solotwina. Note that Adolph's memories were as a child up to about age 12. Regina's memories were up to about age 10.]

O: I remember when my parents immigrated to Germany. At that time I was about 10 years old. Uh.

R: You can give the exact date, Adolph. You can...

O: No, it's not important...I can, okay. [On another tape, he indicated they emigrated from Solotwina in 1900.] Uh, my ambition was, my ambition was to become a bookkeeper. A bookkeeper in the eyes of my parents and me was approximately, approximately, um, like to be an executive of General Motors. That was my highest ambition. For 15 years I left school and I was able to get a position in a office of a cigar factory in Mannheim.

B: Mannheim in Germany.

[Conversation diverged to discussion of life in Germany]

Ren: Tell us a little bit about your childhood...

T: Childhood and, well, tell about, where you were in Slovitna, or someplace. What do you remember about that?

[multiple voices]

O: I was born in Poland and the metrop...metropolis, was the name of the metropolis was Solotwina. Solotwina consisted of, of a big markplatz...piazza...in Italian?

[multiple voices prompting - marketplace, square]

O: A marketplace. A square. Surrounded by stores. And their owners were 100 percent Jewish people.

B: Yah.

Ren: Yah?

B: Sure. Only Jewish people.

O: The big days were on the so-called mark [i.e., market] days, and the farmers brought all their produce to the city, and sold them in the center of the mark place. On the square. And the Jewish women went around and buying, and buying their groceries.

B: [x]...in the center with a little stove.

O: Buy their groceries. And nobody of those women paid, paid the ask price. If a, a sack of potatoes was 13 Kreutzer, then a good housewife said, "I give you 9." [Kreutzer (common English spelling), or Kreuzer (German spelling): any of several small coins of low value formerly used in Austria and Germany.]

T: That's what they call "dinging."

[multiple voices]

O: Yah. They went dinging around and then they made the business was, then accepted for 10 Kreutzer. The bag of potatoes and so on and so on.

R: Now tell the stores were open Gewölbe [arch or vault].

O: Oh yah. The stores did not, did not have, it was called a Gewölbe, and I would translate it in English as a "cave." It was, it was, it was no door and no, and no window. The entrance at night, it was open, and at night the doors were pushed back, were...

Ren: Placed in.

[several voices]

O: Placed in with their, with a crossbar, and that's the way these doors were open. The cold was, this was Ukraina, close to Russia, the cold in winter I guess was approximately 10 and 15 below 0 [°F].

R: Oh, more than that.

O: And those people, the business people, they are freezing to death, and the women had, made an invention, how to save their life, to...

[voices]

O: So, I remember my grandmother. She must have been at that time 85, in the 80s. She still has a store across the Gewölbe of my father. My father's Gewölbe.

R: Our parents had a store with glass doors, and everybody came in and warmed themselves because they had an oven, a stove in there or something. We...

O: We had a stove. Heated by coal.

R: This was, this was...

O: ...extravagant. And my grandmother, I remember distinctly, that heating, she had a heating pot. Wooden, wooden, wooden coal charcoal. She put it in a box charcoal and made a fire, and she pole, and she was sitting on a chair, and she kept the pot...

R: ...under the chair...

O: ...under the chair in the center of her skirt, which reached to the bottom.

R: You wonder that they never got burned.

Ren: I can't understand that.

O: But it was charcoal. It doesn't flame.

Ren: But it can catch fire.

[multiple voices]

B: And a full wide skirt around her.

O: The full wide [x] so she was sitting there...so central heating, so [she had] her own central heating.

[multiple voices]

O: I started the first time, with the first sentence, how times have changed.

Ren: Now we have electric mittens and electric socks for skiers.

T: Thermal underwear.

[Multiple voices, then diverted discussion about work in Germany.]

Ren: Vati, did you know German, when you came to Germany?

O: No. I knew so much German as you knew England when you came from Germany to America.

[laughter]

R: No, no, no, no. Before Germany. Our girls spoke German. Don't you remember? Kurt...[x]

[many voices]

O: Well, so much, that Renee spoke, spoke English, she had the school English, she had the school English, and I had the school German what I learned.

R: Our two girls, the older girls, the, they talked German and they had French teacher. And the German they were, the teacher from the Hill? Schule [school], they...

O: Baron Hill? Schule.

R: Baron Hill? Schule, the teacher for them...

O: ...high school. [Oberschule]

R: ...they have the *Wiener Zeitung*, the newspaper from Vienna.

O: Imported from Vienna.

R: From Vienna. In Solotwina.

[many voices]

R: And the teacher, their boyfriends gave them to read the *Wiener Zeitung*.

O: This was the highest intelligentsia in Solotwina.

R: Kurt was maybe 3 years old and he, he was in the, in the store and Mother gave him an apple or so on, and she said, "Go over to this, em, er," there was a teacher, they bought in our store, you know? So "Go over to Mr. so-and-so and let him give you a knife." You know.

And, instead of saying it in Yiddish, as is usually the case, she, uh, he came over and said to this man, "Gut nichtdes mit thrope?"

O: He's supposed to speak German, you know. It's a different accent if you speak German!

[many voices]

Ren: Put the accent differently on English, like it's a different language, you know.

R: And, I'll never forget it. So he, even he said, er, talked German. And when we left Solotwina in a, in a carriage, in a, in a, in a coach...?

O: Coach, cart.

R: No, a coach. And I sat between my mother and Suse, in, in, in the front, you know? And I turned back. I didn't remember, but Suse told this to the others. I turned around and said, "Adieu, Solotwina, auf Wied—auf Wiedersehen!"

[laughter]

R: So we talked German.

[other voices]

Ren: That means "I'll see you again."

[other voices]

R: So we were very happy. We go, we were very happy we go to Germany. And I, I especially was looking forward to, at that time, Adolph, high ambition...

Ren: How old were you?

R: ...uh, 8? 8, 9? I don't remember. So Adolph's ambition at that time was to get a job in a chocolate factory.

[laughter]

O: So I would be able to bring home some chocolate for my, for my baby brother, my baby sister.

T: He didn't worry about pimples at that time.

[laughter, voices]

R: And then - he didn't have to worry about that --

O: I promised that I would look for a position at a chocolate factory.

[voices, laughter]

R: When we didn't listen to him, didn't do the things we wanted us to be instead, he had to go to the school, he said, "If you don't go, I won't give you any chocolate in Deutschland." You know?

O: You come in Deutschland, I have a position there, you know?

R: Yah. In a chocolate factory, it was, at that time.

[many voices]

O: Well, coming back, I, uh, compare to today's generation with the generation I was a youngster.

R: Up-to-date.

T: Tell us a little bit, I'd like to go back further. What do you remember, or what do you know about your ancestry? We'd like to get that recorded. What do you know about your ancestry on your mother's side and on your father's side.

R: Our father came...Our father was from Solotwina...

[voices, laughter]

R: He was born in Solotwina, and he belonged to the...

O: Mayflower...

R: ...Society.

O: Upper society.

R: And his mother had, his mother had a store, the leading store at that time, you know? And his father sat in the back room learning Talmud, learning. And as I told you he was studying secretly by reading German books.

O: German books. And he was a teacher, too, in school.

R: Yah. And...

O: He was a...

R: No, no, no. His brother was a schoolteacher.

O: Oh, his brother was a schoolteacher.

R: Yah. But he only was learning the Talmud and secretly read medical books, and he was the doctor from the whole shtetl.

O: City. Somebody had some ill, they came. They came to my grand, grandfather.

T: Did they call those Fälschers [forgers, counterfeiter]? What were they called there?

O: No. No, not Fälschers. There is a different expression for them.

R: My mother - this is my father - my mother, well his father, his father came as a widower from Russia. And Solotwina was a, eh, was a resort. A resort place. You know, the woods, and so, it was a resort.

O: A Lukskooaur.

R: Lukskooaur, you know they called it. And he came...

O: You know? It was high in the Carpatan...

R: No, no.

O: Carpathian.

R: No. I am talking about Solotwina.

O: Solotwina, sure. But the Lukskooaur, because it was in the mountains.

R: Sure.

O: Surrounded by woods, by forests and...

R: So this was, uh, also, this was my great grandfather. No, my grand...

T: Your grandfather.

R: No, great grandfather. He came to Solotwina as a widower and fell in love with my grandmother, no grandfather. And he was, he was a well-to-do man...

[laughter]

T: Wait a minute. You said your great grandfather fell in love with your grandfather.

R: No, no. No, no. No. He was the grandfather, from Russia, he was our grandfather, right?

O: Grandfather.

R: And he came as a widower. He was not a young man. He came to Solotwina to have his, to take a cure, and he fell in love with my grandmother, who was a very pretty girl, but he was a very rich man. So he got...

Ron: Do you know where in Russia he came from?

R: No. This I don't. I know only he was Russian.

Ren: Then he continued to live in Solotwina?

R: Yeah.

T: Then what about, now, oh, so you told us about your, on your father's side, and your mother, you don't know...?

O: ...came from Lemberg.

R: Yah. My mother, my mother came from Lemberg. This is already, uh...

O: Was this the capital. This was the capital of Poland.

R: Yah. Galizia.

B: Not Poland.

R: And, er, her parents, they had forests. He was, he, he sold his trees to the mills.

O: I don't think he owned the forest. He was manager of that.

R: He managed it because Jews, according to that book, Jews weren't allowed land [x] [to be landowners?].

O: Yah. He was manage, he was manger, managing, uh, that's, uh...

R: Woods and forest.

B: Was a manager for probably [x].

O: And he sold it, yah, yah. I don't think so.

R: Yah. That he was, and they sold the trees, you know, to...

B: Well, your mother was a lady.

R: She was a lady. She was a sophisticated...

B: She was what you think of as a [x].

R: She went, she came from Lemberg. Lemberg. I mean, uh, her sister married a college graduate fellow. I mean, they were already, and her, and, uh, and her, her, uh, husband, the family, one was a lawyer and during the war, the First World War, this man stood before the, uh, state capitol, or the what you call, on the, on the stairs, and received the Russians when they marched in. And gave speeches and so. I mean, they were already, uh, high class people. So when my mother came to Solotwina, in this little shtetl, as they say here, you know?

Ren: Oy vey!

R: You know? She has the most elegant clothes. The most elegant clothes.

O: She was the talk of the town.

R: And she was, er, and what she wore and everything, and people looked into the windows to look and to see her, you know? And she wasn't so very happy in the beginning but, uh, she got used to it.

O: When she got six children, she got used to it! And she got used to family life, and...

R: Oh, all the children didn't bother her. She had a nurse, a wet nurse for each child. When he was born, after 3 girls...

Ren: Oh, yeah, tell this story.

R: When he was born, when he was born, he had red ribbons somewhere. I don't know where they put red ribbons on him.

O: For what purpose?

R: For to keep away the devil.

[laughter]

R: I don't know.

Ren: Tell about the wet nurse, Vati. And standing on the stool.

[laughter]

O: Oh. Yah. I was already a big boy. I had been told, but I don't know, I cannot remember it myself. I was already a big boy and I was still fed by the mama, they call her the mama or memma or something like this.

?: Mammy.

O: Mammy. Or the mammy.

T: A big boy. He wasn't quite teenage yet, but...

[laughter, voices]

O: Maybe 3 years old, 2-1/2 years old. And I was still fed...

R: No, they kept, they kept, she didn't nurse you when you were 3 years old, but she was, she was your nurse, I mean...

O: No, I remember I was, I could stand up and walk around. And then, and I was too heavy for her to keep me up to her breast. So she took a little chair and I was standing up...

R: ...a stool.

O: ...still the stool, I was standing up. And was fed.

[laughter]

T: He had his lunch and went back to work!

[laughter!!]

Ren: Tell about, the money you used to make with a, with a, uh, a chicken and you squeezed the thing...

R: No, it was a, it was a dog. Wasn't a chicken. Wasn't it a dog?

O: No, it was a ravven. Was it a ravven?

R: A raven.

[voices]

O: A raven, yah.

B: A show, you put on a show...

O: Well, I entertained the shtetl. I was a, the extra of the shtetl. I put on my father's...

[multiple voices]

R: What do you mean what he make? You think he got money? He got buttons!

O: Yah, money didn't exist in Solotwina.

R: Buttons.

O: So, what story, about what...?

Ren: How you performed. You made the...

O: Oh, oh, oh yah. One day I got a, uh, what do you call a rav...?

Ren: Raven.

R: Raven, yah.

O: Raven. And he must have been, it was limp, maybe it was hurt also.

R: I'll bet he was.

O: And I, I trained him. I trained him this way. I said, "I have a trained raven." I took him between my two fingers and I said to him, "Go ahead and tell me a story." Then he went "Rwak! Rwak!" [squawking noise]. So I said, "He talks only when I tell him. Try, you tell him. You will see something whether he will make rah-rah." Everybody tries and nobody did it. And then when I came and I said, "Tell me something." "Rah! Rah!" The secret was - that I had him between my two fingers and I pinched.

[laughter]

O: And the poor...

R: Pinched his legs.

O: I pinched his leg, and the poor fellow, well, didn't feel well, so I made rah-rah, that was my training.

R: He was flying, too.

O: Oh yah. Lah-tah. Oh, now I remember. Lah-tah means "fly". I said, "Lah-tah" and he, and he spreads his wings and moves them. Any time I said so, he, oh it was not, not the rah-rah, he moved his wings, too.

[laughter]

O: And everybody else he didn't, uh, he didn't, uh, act like that.

R: All right, this was when he was already big boy. But when he was a small boy, he had friends coming over and they had a marvelous game among them. He didn't know it, but I saw it. What did he do? They stand there and made pee-pee. The one [laugh] who made the biggest...

[laughter! voices]

R: I don't remember was it him or was it Kurt. I don't remember. But he was the same, too.

[voices]

B: So what did they get for it?

O: Got a button.

B: Another button!

[laughter]

Ron: I'd like to hear some about World War I. If you want to tell.

O: World War I. You, you, you stop it a little.

T: No, well, we'll come to that on the other side. So, let's, what else do you remember about those kids, kids.

R: As kids.

O: As kids. We had a lot of fun. It was a miserable, little city of about 11- or 1200 inhabitants...

R: Oh. Oh. I just remembered something.

O: ...but we entertained ourselves.

R: Oh, yeah, sure.

O: We were, we were, we invented things, and, and theaters and, uh, circuses, and we had old dogs and my chickens and everything and...was a zoo and everything.

R: My two sisters were invited to a very prominent wedding in the next village. He was, he was, uh, Großgrundbesitz [large estate], how do you call it.

O: Oh, Großgrundbesitz, he was the owner of, uh... [they use a word that sounds more like Großgrundbissler??]

R: ...a young man...

O: ...of a big piece of land...

R: ...who ran real estate.

[voices prompting - land, farmer]

R: And both of my sisters, they worked weeks and weeks to be elegant enough, and they went to this wedding. And talked about, now here's only about this wedding. And I want...

O: Months and months.

R: ...I want to see the wedding too. I wanted to see the wedding. So I started out and walked to this, to this place.

O: Village.

R: I must have walked maybe two hours or three, I don't remember. And I went there; nobody knew. I went to this wedding. And I remember when they danced, you know, and, uh, and they gave me cake and everything. Anyway, I was kind of scared, you know, and I want, I was on my way home, and I got stuck in a orchard and they were prunes. Those, the things...

O: Biggest as you can imagine.

R: ...they were full of prunes. So I wore an apron. You know those aprons you wore, you used to wear?

O: That was the trend. Every kid, every girl, every woman had an apron.

B: [x]

O: It belongs, it belongs to be dressed. In order to be dressed, you had to have...

R: Well, you wear this to save your dress.

B: Over your dress, yeah.

R: To save your dress. So I got there, and I filled my...

O: ...whole apron with prunes.

R: ...apron with the prunes. And then I lugged it and I walked, and all of a sudden, on the, I was on the road, and... [tape temporarily stops]...so on the road a farmer came with his carriage and horses, you know? And he helped me get on the carriage. And, we, it was my, uh, apron full of prunes. And I wanted to bring it home, of course, you know? It would ease my punishment if I bring something. I expected to be punished for running away for a whole day, you know?

B: You know, at that time the kids run away already.

R: Well, I had none. It wasn't to run away, I wanted to see, I wanted, I went to the wedding. That's all. Uninvited. So, uh, so I came home. And everybody was glad to see me and I said, "And I brought you prunes. Look at all the prunes." And then I looked, it was maybe 4 or 5 in my aprons! The others I had probably lost on the way.

[voice]

R: I don't know. I was so disappointed at that time, you know.

?: Did you get punished?

R: This I don't remember. It wasn't so, it wasn't so severe because they were glad to see me, I imagine. Nobody cared so very much. Can you imagine? You have three girls already. And you know how, how important...

?O Everybody should be married.

R: And then finally a son came. And then there was another child to be born. So hoping it would be another boy, here it was another girl. Oh. I was a great disappointment to my parents, really. Really I was.

B: And then Kurt.

R: Well, Kurt. Kurt was, Kurt was already spoiled like a child nowadays. There was no [x], girls...would you believe that the two of them and Susan made him a Scottish outfit with a cap and with a skirt. You know?

V: And a veil!  
[voices, laughter]

R: Really. And he had long...

O: ...hair. To the shoulder.

R: ...wavy hair.

O: Blonde, curly hair.

R: Fuss about him.

O: He was a beautiful child.

R: He was beautiful.

O: [x] and beautiful.

R: And he was so spoiled. He didn't let, he didn't let my mother go away. My mother was always to be there. But she used to go to the store in the afternoon. So we were supposed to, uh, play with him and make him forget. So once she said, "Go take him out." And we went behind the house and, and he made all kinds of, uh, uh...

O: Faces.

R: ...faces and so on. I danced around him so he wouldn't notice mother going away. All of a sudden he turned around and he said, "You can stop now. Mother is gone."

[laughter]

R: And the truth.

O: You know. You think you fool children sometimes.

Ron: Did you ever play tricks on your parents?

R: No. No. Tricks? No. Well, he had a, he had, he had...

O: I tricked my parents...

R: He had a dog. He liked dogs.

S: He wouldn't dare.

R: No. No. No.

T: Or friends, so something like that.

R: No. He had a dog. He had a dog. Uh, uh, it was, he was broken out, he was...

[voices, laughter]

R: But he fed him. But...how much can you feed? It was a big dog, like a cat, so he sent, he sent me in to get some bread, and then he sent in Kurt to get some bread for the dog. And then he said, "Go, he wants some more." And I go and my mother said to my father, ["Ungehorsam Kurt engeenin."?? [Disobedient Kurt-----?]. All of a sudden [x]...

[Change in topic of discussion.]