

BEBA LEVENTHAL (nee Epstein)
RG-50.005.0037. (recorded 1984 in Los Angeles)

Beba was born in Vilna in 1925, the oldest of 4 children in a well-to-do family that went back many generations in Vilna. She describes the family's life with private schools and summer houses. When the Russians came in there were major upheavals in her family who were anti-Soviet. When the Germans came into Vilna in June 1941 many Jews left but her family had not made any plans. She describes the anti-Jewish edicts including shooting many Jews in an area called Pinari.

Beba's father had sent her to a farm outside Vilna but in the process of getting Aryan papers she went back to Vilna. Her family was already gone and she never saw them again. She lived with an aunt and had a series of jobs including working in a cousin's garden, doing housekeeping in the Gestapo headquarters. She at one time cleaned for a group of horrible Einsatzkommandos who were always drunk and also worked in the basement of Gestapo headquarters where they tortured and killed many people.

When the ghetto was emptied in 1943 Beba was sent on a train to Kaiserwald camp near Riga. She describes that some people became partisans in the forest under the FPO (Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsye). She names two members of the Bund staff, Abba Kovner and Yitzhak Wittenberg. The latter was caught and killed.

Beba describes Kaiserwald as being similar to Auschwitz. She worked sorting clothes and then in an electronic factory in Riga where they were making equipment for submarines and planes. She was able to do some sabotage. As the Russians heard, she was sent to north Poland for a few months and then to Stutthof, which she describes as the worst camp of all. She was there from October 1944 until April 1945. She was suffering from typhus. The camp was put on boats and barges and were at sea for 10 days without food. She remembers the boat Capricornia sunk and everyone killed. Some Norwegian POWs on her boat were able to detonate explosives meant to blow the whole ship up. When the British liberated them Beba was sent to the hospital to recover from typhus.