

-TITLE-MICHEL SWIERKOS

-I_DATE-11/24/90

-SOURCE-JEHOVAH WITNESS

-RESTRICTIONS-

-SOUND_QUALITY-

-IMAGE_QUALITY-

-DURATION-

-LANGUAGES-

-KEY_SEGMENT-

-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-

-PERSONAL_NAME-

-CORPORATE_NAME-

-KEY_WORDS-

-NOTES-

-CONTENTS-

When were you born? I was born in Poland on November 16, 1911.

Mothers name? Don't remember.

Fathers name?

Josef

What type of work did your father do? He worked at the railroad station.

Did you stay in Germany? No . We stayed until 1919. My father wanted to go to Poland. But he smelled something wrong in Poland.

So, He decided to go to France

What part of France did you end up in? [Abruit??]

What did your father do there? He worked in a mine.

Did you have any brothers and sisters? What were there names?
Josef, Jean, Stanis, and Stasha.

Where were you in age? Third.

When did you get acquainted with Jehovah's witnesses? In 1924.
[He
] came in 1924. He made a speech that whoever survived 1925
would
never die.

How old were you? I was fourteen . I made my decision to be a
servant of God. I went to school and it was Catholic. I didn't
believe anything. I would go to the bathroom and not come back.

I was interested and I preached and studied.

At that time could you legally preach in France? Yes.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, did you notice any change? It
stayed the same until 1939. We were free, we could preach.

Then when Hitler came in 1939? They forbidden the Jehovah's
Witnesses. But we could preach in opposition.

What did the Jehovah's Witnesses preach that made the government forbid them?

Nothing . They just forbid it.

Were you able to continue? Yes. We had no books. We just preached.

When was the first time you were picked up?

1939. They put us in jail. Then to a prison. Then to a concentration camp.

What was the treatment like?

They gave us food and everything. There was no persecution. There

were Spanish people from the revolution of Franco. We were in a French section.

How long did that last? Until 1942.

What kind of work did you do? Cleaning barracks and toilets. No big work.

Did they keep Jehovah Witnesses together? Yes. There were only three of us.

So it was a very small group? Yes.

Were you able to have Bible discussion?

Yes. We could preach in the concentration camp in France. Nobody paid any attention. We were persecuted because we would not salute

the French flag. We were brought to the prison of the concentration

camp. They asked why we would not salute the flag, and we said because we were Jehovah's Witnesses. There were so many rats I could not stand it. The rats could walk on the corners up the wall

about four feet, and then jump.

How long were you in the prison?

It's hard to tell. I think three months. You slept on two pieces of

board and we ate only once a day.

How much longer were you in the concentration camp? I don't know.

We were working in a mine.

We were free two months and we were preaching again. Then, they arrested us again and put us in prison. They came and laughed at us. They said we don't exist. We went to a concentration camp in Brussels. After that we went to Holland, I forget the name.

What type of treatment did you receive?

Real severe. Just working. I saw Himmler. He put his hand on my shoulder.

Did he say anything?

No. He talked to nobody. He just touched you. They took us from Holland in a train. There was no room for lying down. We rode for about a week. There was no bathroom. Then they brought us to Oranienburg/Sachsenhausen.

What was the treatment like?

Police came and everybody sat down. They kicked you and hit you and

I saw many get hit. Then we went to the barracks and we were working.

Did they put numbers on you? No. Not at Sachsenhausen.

Did they take your clothing?

No. We had our clothes from the other concentration camp. Then, we

got another uniform with a number and a purple triangle.

Did they shave your head?

The next day. They had big showers and they shaved your head. There

were 150-200 people in the barracks. By the end there were three to

a bed.

Did they have heat?

No. But there was heat from so many people. But it stunk. Too many people.

What would happen if a prisoner was sick? There was nothing done.

Who was in charge of the barracks? I can't remember exactly anymore.

Was there a bathroom? Yes.

So, when you got there what type of a job did you do at first? Fieldwork or digging, I can't remember exactly.

They killed people when we were working. There were many jews killed. One guy was killed because he was [digging incorrectly].

Why did they kill them?

I don't know. They needed oil for the trucks and planes. So they would take the human cadavers and burn them to get the oil.

From the human bodies?

Yes. From the human body. They just got the oil from the fat. I don't know if this was true, I just heard this. Or they take people to dig a hole. When the hole was over someone's head they would shoot him and the others would cover it up.

What time did your day begin? 5:30. You stand in line for an hour

or so.

Is that when you ate?

I don't think so. You only ate once a day. All the people were skeletons.

So, people got thinner and thinner? Ya. I worked in a bakery.

How was it that you worked in a bakery

I was a bakery. They were looking for Jehovah's witnesses for bakers. I distributed bread for S-men and prisoners. It was a terrible job. The S-men would ask for more bread and you could not

give it. It was a terrible job.

What type of food did you make in the bakery? Just bread.

What were other groups besides Jehovah's Witnesses and Jews?

Yes. Russians and Germans. Criminals. There were many different types of people there.

How did they treat the soldiers from Russia?

I don't know. They were skeletons. The S-men would say, "Come

here", so I would go there to him. He could knock me down, beat me,

then say "Go back", and then "Come again".

What was the most unusual thing you witnessed while you were there?

I saw people put on a roof and made to sweat, then they threw you

on the concrete---15-20 feet down.

What about the stones?

What stones? [someone else talking] Oh yes.

Many prisoners, if they did something wrong had to take off their

shoes and run on stones. Then, they would be shot.

Did you see anyone executed?

I saw many who were executed There would be three or four soldiers

with machine guns. You would hear a cry and someone would fall.

Then an officer would walk over and shoot them in the head.

How many people a night would you say died in the barracks? I don't

know. I never counted.

So, you had someone die every day?

Yes. After that we had the death march. When the Russians were approaching and the Americans were approaching. The S-men were

afraid to be captured by the Russians. They wanted to be captured

by the Americans. Also, they cut their hair and put on the same suit that we had.

What did the prisoners do?

They recognized them and lynched them. I could not stand it. I went away.

You have a book you can show us?

{Shows a book w/map and pictures of the death march}

How long did it take? I don't remember-- one or two weeks.

You said before that all of Jehovah's witnesses were kept together.? Yes. We were 230. There were also two jews with us

You said you were pushing a wagon? Yes. [shows pictures] When someone was tired we could put them on the cart.

So, you were helping other people?

Yes. Men and women were dead all over the place

How many would you say died on the Death March? Hundreds and hundreds.

Was the weather cold? This was in the spring. I think it was May
or
June.

What time did you start every morning? When the day came on.

How many soldiers were there to guard all these people? I don't
know. Every few feet there would be one on each side.

Finally, what would happen at the end?

The S-man disappeared. There was such shouting. Jews were
shouting,
shouting. There were cadavers everywhere. There were so many
cadavers. There was the American army. We got food and stayed
for
a couple of days.

How many Jehovah's witnesses survived the March? Everyone. Not
one
Jehovah's Witness died on the March.

Where did you go?

I went home, to France. My wife would not embrace me. She was
with
another man. She thought I was dead.

What type of work did you do?

I worked in the bakery. I did pioneering . I would go to Belgium.

[.something about pioneering being illegal in France]

Afterwards you came to the U.S.?

I was told by the police that I could not go door to door preaching. They took me to prison. So, I went back to Germany and

France to go pioneering. You could only work in a mine or a factory. I went to a congregation.

What year did you come to the United States?

1956. The jews advertised this. They were offering to bring concentration camp victims to the U.S. It took until 1957. They gave me 400 dollars and asked if I wanted to fly or go to the ship.

I took the ship. I stayed with a family in Chicago for free. At first, I could not get my citizenship because I would not salute the flag. Three or four weeks later they decided to give me the citizenship.

Could we get a picture of your wife ... daughter...

.END.

Transcript Version 2

Michel Swierkos (JW)

When were you born?

I was born in Poland on November 16, 1911.

Mothers name?

Don't remember.

Fathers name?

Josef

What type of work did your father do?

He worked at the railroad station.

Did you stay in Germany?

No . We stayed until 1919. My father wanted to go to Poland. But he smelled something wrong in Poland. So, He decided to go to France

What part of France did you end up in?

[Abruit??]

What did your father do there?

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Did you have any brothers and sisters? What were there names?

Josef, Jean,Stanis, and Stasha.

Where were you in age?

Third.

When did you get acquainted with Jehovah's witnesses?

In 1924. [He] came in 1924. He made a speech that whoever survived 1925 would never die.

How old were you?

I was fourteen . I made my decision to be a servant of God. I went to school and it was Catholic. I didn't believe anything. I would go to the bathroom and not come back.

I was interested and I preached and studied.

At that time could you legally preach in France?

Yes.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, did you notice any change?

It stayed the same until 1939. We were free, we could preach.

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They forbided the Jehovah's Witnesses. But we could preach in opposition.

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What was the treatment like?

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How long did that last?

Until 1942.

What kind of work did you do?

Cleaning barracks and toilets. No big work.

Did they keep Jehovah's witnesses together?

Yes. There were only three of us.

So it was a very small group?

Yes.

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Did he say anything?

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What was the treatment like?

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Did they put numbers on you?

No. Not at Saxon-Hausen.

Did they take your clothing?

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Did they have heat?

No. But there was heat from so many people. But it stunk. Too many people.

What would happen if a prisoner was sick?

There was nothing done.

Who was in charge of the barracks?

I can't remember exactly anymore.

Was there a bathroom?

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