

Krispin, Hanni
RG-50.029*0035
One Video Tape
In English

Abstract

Hanni Krispin was born on March 23, 1924 in Memel, Lithuania. In 1938 the family moved to Kovno. Hanni's family was very conservative and observant. As a young child Hanni very much wanted her family to go to Palestine, but her father was against it. When Hanni was 16 years old the Russians occupied Lithuania. She remained active in Zionist youth groups. After the Nazis invaded Kovno (Kaunas) and the Russians fled, Lithuanian forces arrested Hanni's family. Hanni's father was taken away and she never saw him again. Under the Nazis, Hanni and her mother were imprisoned for a few weeks. Hanni's family was eventually forced into the Kovno ghetto, and on October 16, 1941 the ghetto was officially closed. In July of 1944 Hanni and her mother were deported, along with other women, to German work camps.

Oral History

- 00:00:31 Krispin was born on March 23, 1924 in Memel, Lithuania.
- 00:01:42 In December of 1938 her father transferred his international import-export business to Kovno. Hanni attended a Hebrew academy in Kovno.
- 00:02:25 Kovno was the only place to which the family felt they could go. Hanni's mother had always wanted to join her family in Palestine. Hanni had gone twice to visit her family in Palestine. She wanted to be close to her grandmother. Hanni's father did not want to go to Palestine. He thought of himself as part of the German culture, until he returned to Germany from Trieste in December of 1938 and saw a sea of Nazi flags.
- 00:05:31 The family was very observant. On Saturdays the maid carried Hanni's books to school, and she did not write in school.
- 00:07:34 When the family moved to Kovno, Hanni integrated quite easily. School was in Hebrew, and she became fluent in Hebrew but did not know Yiddish.
- 00:09:06 Hanni had an active social life. When she was 15 years old she joined the youth movement, Maccabee Ha-tzair. She had to catch up academically and also had to learn Lithuanian. She had two groups of friends and was always busy.
- Hanni

- 00:10:49** Hanni's family observed the Sabbath. Her father insisted that she stay for Kiddush on Friday night, but then she could go to her meetings.
- 00:13:04** The family lived in a beautiful flat. Her father did not want them to live in crowded conditions.
- 00:15:16** Hanni was the only one who wanted to go to Palestine. She had the "Zionist bug."
- 00:15:57** Her parents had certificates to go to Palestine. Hanni thought that if she could apply to school in Palestine and live with her uncle, then her parents would follow. She maintained a secret correspondence with her uncle.
- 00:18:28** When Hanni was 16 years old the Russians occupied Lithuania.
- 00:18:49** June 20 was last day of school before vacation. She had tickets to *Rigoletto*. This was the same night that Russian tanks invaded Kovno. Hanni's parents sent her to a summer resort in Poland.
- Changes in Kovno went into effect quickly. Hanni's parents called her back from the resort at the end of July. The Russians gave her family 24 hours to vacate their beautiful flat.
- Her father's business was confiscated. He still had money in the bank and was able to move the family into a small hotel.
- Hanni continued to attend the Jewish school where she learned Yiddish and Russian. The curriculum changed; two years of education were combined into one. Hanni finished school two days before the Germans marched into Kovno and the Russians fled.
- 00:24:45** Hanni always had Jewish friends and still met with her Zionist group even though it was very risky. Jewish communists were running the school.
- 00:27:19** Her father realized that he had made a wrong decision in not leaving Kovno. The family had moved into another flat, but it was far from their previous beautiful one. It was out in the country with three other Jewish families from Mela. But they were requisitioned into the army.
- 00:30:03** Hanni participated in official Jewish activities, but she did go to summer camp. The Lithuanians were always anti-Semitic.
- Lithuanians hid weapons everywhere during the Russian occupation. Some Lithuanians rescued Jewish children. When the Russians left, the Lithuanians were free to attack Jews.

00:35:20

The Lithuanians eventually arrested the family. Hanni's father was taken away and she never saw him again. The family thought he had been sentenced to hard labor, but a year later someone told them that he had been shot at the Fort. Hanni's father was a proud, decent, honorable man, and Hanni felt relieved that he never saw how degraded she and her mother became.

00:40:29

When the Nazis came, she and her mother were imprisoned for a few weeks and then sent back to their little flat. The Jewish baker was very helpful. Every night they packed their china and crystal into crates in a cellar; the crates were destroyed.

00:43:12

They connected with friends from the underground. Whoever was left moved across the small bridge to Siobodka. Hanni and her mother took some furniture and were given one room and a tiny kitchen. The toilet was outside.

00:45:21

The large part of ghetto had one main street. The houses were tiny, and there were about three blocks of apartments. Some of the more modern houses had running water, others did not. They got water from a well. The hospital and orphanage were guarded by Lithuanian and Jewish police. The Seventh Fort was far from the ghetto; the Ninth Fort was much closer and people could hear the endless shooting. Austrian and German Jews were brought to the Ninth Fort. All except a few Russians and Jews were killed.

00:49:38

Hanni volunteered in an orphanage where she fed and took care of children. One day she got sick. It was the same day the orphanage was burned down. She and her mother were placed in a group of cleaning women for two or three months. A total of 35,000 Jews remained in both ghettos.

00:53:47

Everything was rationed and there was a black market. When the Germans were defeated in battles, they enforced more restrictions upon the Jews. Conversely, when they were winning, they put less pressure on the Jews.

00:55:43

On October 16, 1941, the ghetto was officially closed. The only way in or out was through official gates. There was an orchestra in the ghetto as well as underground meetings and lectures about Zionism. They tried to pass on information to the younger people.

Hanni worked in the ghetto cleaning German mess kits and cutting wool and mending German socks. She made teddy bears in the toy department. It was a much better atmosphere, and they even discussed literature.

- 01:01:08** Hanni worked very hard in order to help her mother as much as possible. Her mother knew about the Zionist meetings. They were very friendly with Mrs. Tory, who tried to make life easier for her mother.
- 01:03:20** Hanni attended underground meetings where they argued energetically about the best type of government. Everyone was full of energy and hope. They learned Hebrew songs.
- 01:07:20** Her mother contacted some of Hanni's father's Lithuanian friends. One lady visited them in the ghetto, and she would come and take their valuables in order to keep them in a safe place. Hanni recalls that she was very protective, a "good lady."
- 01:10:32** The Lithuanians did all the dirty work for the Germans - only too obligingly. However, some Lithuanians did save children.
- 01:11:31** The Altestenrat was formed by outstanding members of Jewish community including Golub, Tory, and Garfunkle. They were given authority over the Jewish police, food distribution, health care, and work brigades. They created a large police force.
- 01:14:02** Every day Jews were selected for deportation by the Jewish police. Jews always had spirit and hope. Hanni did not know the criteria for being deported.
- 01:17:18** Dr. Elkus was a very special person. He knew German, could communicate very well, and was respected by the Germans. He had integrity, devotion and determination to serve the people.
- 01:18:37** Hanni went to a Seder in an underground bunker. Twenty people attended and followed all the rituals. Some who survived remember that night, and singing "Next Year in Jerusalem," or at least freedom.
- 01:21:50** "Actions," or selections, in the ghetto became smaller. Everyone knew what was happening and they also knew about the Vilna ghetto. The primary focus was on surviving each day.
- The underground bunker was discovered on July 12, 1944. They were made to sit on the ground in pouring rain. Lipsberg had taken something but was shot.
- They were put into a mill and then evacuated. Some people remained in the mill which was set on fire. Hanni and her mother were put in a cattle car and given bread, water, and honey. The men were sent to Dachau and the women were sent to forced labor camps. They smuggled a few gold coins in their anus.

01:27:34 In Kovno there was kindness, unity, and harmony. People tried to assist one another and talked to each other. Hanni felt unrelenting friendship and support. They were all absolutely dependent on one another. Even the police, although they had to use force, were as fair as possible. They were not sadists. "This is my subjective feeling. It's very difficult to judge these police."

01:32:44 As an only child, Hanni felt that she had to support and care for her mother.

01:34:15 Hanni had a happy childhood until the age of 15. She felt very fortunate in her upbringing, which gave her strength for later on.

"Every day is a gift. I am very grateful"

01:36:05 "My sitting here is a miracle. It is a miracle that my mother survived and lived until the age of 83 when she died surrounded by friends and family. I am glad that my father did not have to live through those years."

"I wish that my dear friends could have lived to tell their stories and to witness the establishment of the State of Israel. Thank you for listening."