

ARIE, YOCHEVED

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Two Videotapes

In Yiddish and English

Abstract

Yocheved Arie was born in Vilnius, Lithuania on February 15, 1928. Following the German occupation, her father and brother were taken away while she and her mother had to go to the ghetto. In addition to poor sanitation, they experienced *aktions* in the ghetto carried out by the Germans. One day her mother did not return from work outside the ghetto, but was instead transported with others to Estonia. Yocheved and others were eventually transported to this location as well, where she and her mother were reunited.

She was eventually transported to Stutthof, and then to work in Gdansk, making railroad tracks. On the second day of a Death March shortly before the end of the war, she and her mother, along with others, were finally liberated.

Following the war's end, Yocheved and her mother returned to Vilnius, where they found no survivors from their family. They decided to emigrate to Palestine, but after crossing many borders, they came to a Displaced Persons camp in Germany, where they remained for three years. After leaving the German camp, they finally arrived in Jerusalem. Yocheved's mother stayed with her for 40 years until her mother died.

In addition to her prayers for future generations, Yocheved understands the strength and heroism of Jewish mothers during the Holocaust to a much greater degree today than she did during her younger years. They were not only forced to suffer themselves, but made to endure the sight of their children's suffering and demise.

Tape I

5:03 Yocheved's father and brother (b. in 1921) were taken away by the Germans a week after they occupied Lithuania, while she stayed alone with her mother at their home on Kushtenova 232. A week later, the Jews had to wear yellow stars. There were all kinds of posters. The Germans took all the men supposedly to work, but it was actually to their deaths. The Germans killed the Jews in Paneriai (Ponary) and brought Jews in from France, Holland, and many other places. This occurred before the Vilnius Ghetto was established. They then took some people to jail and to the ghetto in Vilnius, which was the center of Jewish life (Yitzkover St., Strasenai). Conditions were very poor. There were eight or ten families in one room and some people were living in the streets. It's hard to describe how difficult it was for them, and hard for others to believe. She came to the ghetto only with her mother.

5:07 In 1933, Yocheved was five years old and could not tell about the conditions then. She attended school.

5:09 In 1939, when the Lithuanians were in Vilnius, there was no change. The Jews lived normal lives because they were not prisoners. Life changed in 1941 when the Germans invaded.

In 1941, the Jews felt that the Germans came to fight only the Jews, not the Russians, and the Germans' goal was to destroy all the Jews. As Jews, they were not free to do things. When they went out, they had to wear a yellow star. The Germans changed the orders daily.

5:13 Yocheved and others could not believe how inhuman the Germans could be. She still believed that her father would come back. Sanitation conditions in the ghetto were very bad. *Aktions* were taken in the ghetto. The Germans took the old and sick, and said that they would take them to a sanatorium, when in reality they took them to their deaths. There were different orders daily. No one knew what would happen next.

5:17 Yocheved hid in a room with 41 people, including one small child, for three days. A buffet was blocking the door so that the Germans would not know that there was a room there. She could not remember everything exactly as it happened.

5:19 In one of the *aktions*, Yocheved and her mother were gathered by Lithuanians and Poles to walk five in a row on the way to Paneriai. They passed a jail near Lukisher Street and her mother dragged her away from the jail and the line of Jews. They suddenly found themselves walking with Christians. They were jealous of birds, cats, and dogs because they had freedom. Yocheved and her mother were allowed to walk only in the streets, not on sidewalks.

5:21 She and her mother joined the people on the sidewalk and found their way to their house where their housekeeper stayed. She was always very good to them. She let them in and gave them food, but Yocheved and her mother were told that the police were looking for them, so they had to leave immediately. The only place where they could go was to a labor camp where Yocheved's aunt and uncle were, in Kalisz.

5:23 They did not have proper papers and were there illegally. They stayed in Block 1 for three days and then had to leave. That was the last time Yocheved saw her aunt and uncle.
She and her mother tried to go back to the ghetto. It was very difficult, but they managed to join a group of 23 people coming back from work. The people would sometimes have a potato or bread that they purchased, but it was confiscated at the gate.

5:26 They found shelter on Litske Street #16, where they stayed for almost half a year, with six families in one room. Always hungry, they were fortunate to be with very fine people. Everyone shared food. Yocheved's mother used to work at the railroad station, while she worked with a shoemaker.
One day when her mother was supposed to return to the ghetto from work, they rounded up about 150 people and put them on wagons to take them to Estonia.

5:29 Her mother tried to escape because she knew that Yocheved was by herself in the ghetto. Unfortunately, she did not succeed.

- 5:32** Yocheved said that it was difficult to understand how a 13-year-old could remain all alone, not knowing whether any family members were alive. It was hard for her to comprehend, remembering that painful time in her life. She didn't know where they took her mother. The people who shared a room with Yocheved were very nice to her.
- 5:34** Yocheved describes life in the ghetto: It was run by the *Judenrat*. They established schools for the children and every day there were fewer students. There was a theater which the Germans also attended.
- 5:37** While she was alone in the ghetto, the housekeeper who was Christian put on a Jewish star and rags and came to take Yocheved to a small village when the housekeeper heard that Yocheved's mother had been taken away. Yocheved thanked the housekeeper, but decided to stay in case her mother returned.
- 5:40** It was announced that Yocheved and others would be taken to their families in Estonia. She had to become a part of someone's family so that she could leave with them. They were thrown on cattle cars without food, water, or bathrooms, and the door was closed. They passed Paneriai and everyone knew at that time that it was a death camp. People started crying. However, the train went back and forth, and did not stop in Paneriai. They traveled almost ten days. Occasionally the door would be opened and some bread would be thrown in or a drink of water would be given. Conditions were horrible, and she cannot believe that they survived.
- 5:41** They arrived at Vaivara – Estonia, the first camp for Jews. When Yocheved arrived at the camp, she asked about her mother, but no one knew her. Finally, one woman said that she knew a lady who cried all the time because she had left her daughter in the ghetto of Vilnius. She arrived at 12:00 and her mother was supposed to come back at 5:00. Yocheved tried to stay to see her but they gathered all the people who had just arrived. She was the last one, and she cried. She also would not speak Estonian. One soldier asked why she cried, and she said that she wanted to go to the camp. When the guard stopped her at the entrance and asked why she was returning, she told him that her foot hurt and she was told that she could go back for one night and rest. She asked to go to the barrack where the woman had told her that her mother was staying. Yocheved anxiously awaited the women's return from work. When the women returned, she did not recognize her mother. She looked like an animal, not like a person. Her mother, however, recognized her and embraced her and started to cry. Her mother was beyond recognition, and asked Yocheved why she was not with their Christian housekeeper.
- 5:49** She and her mother were inseparable; they even went to the bathroom together. Eventually, about 100 women were taken to Kalevi Liiva in Estonia, along with people from the Vilnius Ghetto. Their work was to sort stones. They worked in a factory in three shifts. They only had a place to sleep. No shoes or socks were provided. Many doctors and professors were with them in Kalevi Liiva. They did not starve, they had food. Three girls were taken to work in a German kitchen where they prepared vegetables for cooking.
- 5:55** To punish people, they would put a chair in the center and call up a prisoner for lashing.

Tape II

- 5:57** Yocheved thought that she would get slapped. Instead, they cut off all her beautiful hair. She begged that they shoot her instead of cutting her hair, but they cut off all her hair. The inmates cut off part of her dress and put it on her head. She was not the same after her hair was cut off. She stayed there for three months.
- 6:01** They were put back into cattle cars and taken to Tallinn, where they were put on a ship and sent to Stutthof. From there they sailed to Gdańsk (Danzig). They were told to kneel and to raise their hands to God in the hopes that He would help them.

They were taken to the Stutthof concentration camp, where meticulous records were kept. They were thrown into a barrack, and everyone inquired about family members.

Conditions in Stutthof

- Yocheved and others were chased into the cold – without a towel or coat, and wearing shoes made of wood. They were awakened at 3:00 am or 4:00 am, and had nothing with which to wash. They were beaten in the washroom. Conditions were horrible, but everyone wanted to survive to tell what happened to the Jews.
- 6:09** Yocheved went into a gas chamber where she and others were asked to undress. It was so crowded that they could not move. Shower heads hung from the ceilings. Suddenly, the door opened and they were chased, naked, into the cold. They were told that there was a power failure -- that was their good luck.
- 6:13** They were sent out to work in factories or farms. Rüsselsheim – took 300 women who lived in three barracks. The food was terrible. Yocheved and others were awakened at 4:00 am and forced to walk three kilometers until they arrived at Gdansk, where they worked making railroad tracks. On the way back to camp, they pulled out a carrot or grass. Sometimes they were lucky and a passerby would throw them half a sandwich. They stayed there for two to three months. Being forced to leave Rüsselsheim, they went to Shtrelerkin (?), where they stayed for three days.
- 6:15** A lot of people had typhus in Shtrelerkin (?). Yocheved contracted typhus and had a high fever, but she went out for roll call. Then, they had to leave the camp. Shortly after that, they were liberated. They did not know dates or what time it was. They lived like animals.
- 6:17** When they were told that they could leave the camp, it was a bad sign. The room where the food was stored was opened and the prisoners were told that they could have anything they wanted. Yocheved was too ill and could not eat, but her mother was trying to think of a plan to get her out of the camp. Their will to live was strong and they got out of the camp. While on the way they saw a light, but Yocheved could not walk anymore because she was so weak. A German soldier told her to go on the side. That meant that they

would go on the Death March. They saw dead bodies in the snow. The people were like skeletons.

- 6:20** Yocheved's mother had seen that Yocheved was seated on a bench, so she turned around and faced a German Nazi. He slapped her so hard that she fell down. The Nazi also called her "Farfluchtenner Jude!" She had fainted and the guard kicked her to see if she was alive. That brought her back, but she did not move and stayed on the ground. In the meantime, he had forgotten about Yocheved and had started marching away. The Germans were afraid because the end was near. On the second day of the march, they were liberated. They had no idea that the end of the war had been so close.
- 6:22** Yocheved could not go near her mother. She was too weak and did not know if her mother was still alive. Her mother got up, and Yocheved was very relieved. German soldiers from the front were also walking. Her mother asked whether she remembered the light that they had seen when they marched, and Yocheved responded that it was far away. Her mother said that it was nearby and that they should head that way. She encouraged Yocheved and gave her strength and hope that they would survive. Yocheved crawled like an animal to the house. They went into the place where the cans were kept. It was clean. Yocheved had a high fever.
- 6:27** As her mother looked around, she saw Polish people hiding there. When the two Poles asked who they were, Yocheved's mother told them that they were political prisoners and had lost their entire family.
- 6:28** They slept there, and very early in the morning one of the Poles came over to them and said, "I know that you are Jews. Don't leave. The Russians are very close. We will be liberated either today or tomorrow." As he spoke, the German farmer came out and told the Poles that they had to leave the stall immediately. Yocheved was too sick to move. They saw that the German farmer was packing his belongings and getting ready to leave the farm.
- 6:30** Before the Germans fled, the farmer brought Yocheved and her mother bread and some coffee. When Yocheved's mother told her that they had been liberated by the Russians, she thought that her mother was hallucinating. One of the Russian soldiers was a Jew, and he told them that they were the first Jews that he had come across after the war. He was so happy that he didn't know what to do for them first. He carried Yocheved and put her on a bed, where he washed her and took care of her. He stayed with them for five days, but said that it was too dangerous for them to stay there. He took them by horse and wagon to Lwówek, where they stayed for a week. Their wish was to return to Vilnius. Medics wanted to put Yocheved in a hospital, but her mother did not allow it because she did not want them to be separated.
- 6:34** After three weeks, Yocheved was finally getting better and she and her mother wanted to go to Vilnius to find someone from their family. The journey took three weeks. When they arrived in Vilnius, they found no one, just stones and destruction. She and her mother decided that they would go to Israel (then Palestine). They left Vilnius by train, and then walked and crossed many borders until they came to a Displaced Persons camp

in Germany. They remained there for three years. Yocheved studied there and became a midwife. They left for Palestine on an illegal ship, and were detained in Marseilles for three months. During that period, Israel became independent. The joy that they felt was beyond description. They arrived in Jerusalem, where Yocheved's mother stayed with her for 40 years until the mother died.

6:40 Now that Yocheved is getting older, she understands how strong and heroic the Jewish mothers were during the Holocaust and what pain they had to endure watching their children suffer and, in many cases, perish. She hopes that a Holocaust will never happen again to the Jewish people, and that future generations may live in peace.