

## **RG-50.030.0823**

### **Summary**

Efraim Jessner, born September 8, 1924 in Tavrig (Tauragė), Lithuania, 30-40 kilometers from the East Prussian border; mentions here and several more times that he was advised in captivity during the war to change his birth year to be older so that he could work instead of being sent with the children who were likely to be killed – as a result all of his documents to this day give his birth year as 1920; youngest of 4 children: older sister Miriam born around 1908, second sister Chaja born thereafter and brother Mordechai (Max) was the third child; father was David Jessner; mother was Breine (Haberman) Jessner, both from Tavrig; his grandparents were also from Tavrig; Father started a successful poultry export business in Tavrig with one of his three brothers, exporting poultry, eggs, butter and cheese first to Germany and later to England and Sweden; father also employed 60-70 women to process the chicken and duck feathers for export; Efraim spoke Yiddish at home, learned Lithuanian and German in school and Hebrew in the Hebrew high school; there was a large extended family in Tavrig from both sides as mother and father each had 4 siblings; Efraim recalled fondly his traditional family, warm, kind parents and weekly synagogue attendance; father often invited outsiders to Shabbat, once including Ze'ev Jabotinsky, well-known Zionist and Betar founder; Efraim was too young to join but his brother joined; at age 6 Efraim met uncle Leopold Jessner, director at the Berlin Opera House; later learned that the wife of Herman Göring, who worked for Leopold J. in the '30s, helped him emigrate to the US in 1930; Efraim accompanied his father on business trips to England, Germany and Sweden; has fond memories of family life; related that 1/3 of the 60,000 residents of Tavrig were Jewish and that rumors of anti-Semitism started coming from Germany in the early 1930s; in 1938 learned right away of the Night of Broken Glass after which many Jews fled from annexed Memmel to Tavrig; told of Russian soldiers taking over two room sin family home when war began; after Poland was invaded by Germany anti-Semitism spread and Tavrig was set on fire; the Jessner family fled burning home in the middle of the night to "Shavro" (?) with the clothes on their backs, traveling on foot (car had burned) 200 km in two days; after 6 months Efraim and parents were moved to one ghetto, Max and Chaja to another, while Miriam had already immigrated to Israel; in the ghetto Efraim was advised to change his birth year as explained above; in ghetto worked cleaning shoes and pumping water and for this got enough food; Efraim was told one day by a German general that the war would not last much longer; related that one day after work he learned that 900 prisoners had been taken away, including his parents, and were killed nearby; in 1935 Miriam entered into a sham marriage to gain Israeli citizenship but later married the same man for real and had 2 children; after 2.5 years in ghetto transported by train car, standing room only, to Stutthof camp where there were 100 people in each barrack and he worked in the crematorium; he witnessed many murders and deaths from exhaustion; at the end of 1943 transported to Dachau with 70-80 people per car; in Dachau housed in underground barracks and worked in the woodshop and later in agriculture for a German from outside the camp whose name Efraim doesn't recall but with whom he maintained a relationship after the war; recalls the exit march from Dachau May 4, 1945: 900 prisoners and 2000 guards after which only 160 prisoners survived; upon reaching village of Waldkirchen met by Americans and given food, then transported by the Jewish Committee to a camp near Munich that had been a German military base; after 5-6 days there

Efraim was able to get a 5-6 room apartment in Munich (entire fifth floor of a building at intersection of Leopoldstrasse and Zollernstrasse) in part because of his famous uncle Leopold, moving in with 8 acquaintances from the camp; in Munich entered into black market business with an acquaintance from Lodz, Poland, dealing in currency and food; through this acquaintance Efraim found his brother and sister in Lodz who then joined him in Munich, even acquiring a second, larger apartment due to his German ability and the Jessner name; in 1946 became disillusioned with Germany and decided to try his luck in Paris; life in Paris was difficult as a non-French Jew but he remained there two years before returning to Pforzheim, where he sold diamonds for an acquaintance; met a Polish girl named Stella (who had lived in Israel during the war and settled in Vienna after the war) in the late 1940's in Vienna and married her around 1954; Efraim and Stella had two daughters: Beatrix, born in Vienna and Wilma, born in Germany; both grew up in Germany with no difficulties; Efraim enjoyed a reputation as an honest, trustworthy and reliable diamond merchant and jeweler; he recalls that his father had advised him to always be honest, saying "With an honest name you can always leave and come back; with a dishonest name you can only leave."; Efraim recalls that he only dealt with Jews in business and that the Jewish population of Pforzheim had grown when 30 Romanian/Yiddish families had settled there after the war; Efraim remains an observant Jew and often attends family reunions in Israel; more than war experiences Efraim wants the younger generation to know the importance of always being honest as his father taught him.