

RG-50.031.0101

Summary

David "Dave" Figman (Interview 1 Apr 9, 1996-5 tapes 2 hr. 22 min; Interview 2: Nov 12, 2012 1 hr. 18 min)

b.12/24/1926 Warsaw; parents (middle of 3 brothers/2 sisters); family attends synagogue regularly; public school (taught religious classes where students were separated according to religion), after-school Cheder; father (Zionist) had tailor shop in house/mother-homemaker; emphasis in home on reading ("read a lot with gentile friends"); older sister died at Treblinka, younger brother at Auschwitz; sister flees to Russia then "sent to Siberia"; (1939) with mother, David flees to Russian-occupied Poland; discussion on Hitler, rumors, outbreak of war; Warsaw ghetto, forced into slave labor laying bricks; abuse by Germans; brother forced into labor; most bricklayers were Polish Jews who had been sent to school in Palestine but sent back (before war); only food received was bread, "tasted like sawdust," sometimes receiving a little potato soup; uncertainty on where cattle cars were going packed with Jews; father continues as tailor in ghetto; Warsaw Ghetto's Czerniaków; Jack Eisner; little brother who "looked like gentile," smuggling in food; escaping shooting of Jews; after best friends' killings, losing faith in God; massacre on "empty place like a soccer field. They were shooting everyone in head."; most of family deported (David retained for forced labor in auto factory); joining ghetto's underground; realization that family wasn't coming back; people dying from typhus; Jan 1943 only five in David's resistance & with no choice "going to death anyway," exiting ghetto to take clothes to exchange for food, "try mixing with friendly Gentiles"; skin doctor in ghetto, operating on penises "to look Gentile"; ghetto uprising, throwing Molotov's on tanks; Anielewicz; deporting only girls; leg wounded; gas entering holes SS had drilled into ghetto, fleeing, rounded up, gold taken away, taken to holding area; gratification seeing SS fearful to enter ghetto; 150 packed on cattle car train "belly to belly"; Treblinka, saved because all in car were young-could be used for slave labor; transfer to Majdanek, where few survive, told to lie that he knows sheet metal, sent to airplane factory Bedzin (7 months); after SS threatening 100 Jews death, SS stringing penis of a selected, then ordering Jews to kill a Jew (broke his neck); finding potato peelings to survive; receiving kindness from S.S. who brought David soup/bread that he shared with friends; 1943 (now 16 yrs. old) slave labor digging anti-tank ditches; transfer to Mielec (2 months) "Russian Army coming closer"; seeing horses killed in electric wire; David returns to discussing Bedzin, prisoners' failed escape into forest; winter 1944, transfer to Flossenbug, met imprisoned Leon Blum & Bonhoeffer, priests ("One blessed me."); transfer to Holleischen (Czech) ammunition testing; transfer back to Flossenbug; refusing to eat human flesh someone was selling from crematory; as Russian Army encroaches, SS start shootings, force march out of camp; hiding in barn, peering out, realizing liberation; "Day Americans liberated, I was born again."; Rotz DP camp; ambivalence in returning to Poland, "Everywhere is Jewish blood."; Marseilles; by boat to Israel; various jobs; 1959 arrival to US (brother had made it to Chicago); work as barber; marriage, 3 daughters/2 grandchildren; extended family killed in Holocaust; I still ask, "Where was God?"; David returns to discussing a Bedzin SS General, hung because he was found to be "5th generation Jew"; When interviewer asks David, "What should be learned from the Holocaust?" David's response, "Equality for everyone...Love each other."; David shows

his "K.L." tattoo forced on him at Mielec; family photographs (parents, siblings; liberation, Rotz); brief interview with David's wife Myrtle who along with David, co-founded Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois (HMFII)

Part 2: Further discussion on Bedzin killing discussed in Interview 1-forced with others to kill another Jew (discloses string was also put around victim's neck); liberation; in Israel fighting War of Independence; working in US; meeting Myrtle; more on knowing Jack Eisner from Warsaw Ghetto (now a millionaire in US); more on camps where David was imprisoned; machine guns used at Majdanek; assisting a wounded prisoner who encouraged David to "live for tomorrow," advice David thought of when he received his slice of bread every 3 days; new life in America, barber in hospital; co-founding with benefactor Jack Eisner the HMFII and its primary goal of Holocaust education, key figures on first board (only survivors), efforts toward installing mandatory teaching of Holocaust in public schools (first in country); David explores at length the earliest fundraising, organizational, construction efforts of Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois (Skokie), now Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center.