

ISRAEL IPSON

Place Interviewed: JEWISH COMMUNITY FEDERATION OF RICHMOND

Date: Not marked on tapes.

Transcriber of Tapes: Jan Masal

Job Opportunities for Jews just prior to the Holocaust -

Tape I 2:00, 3:00, 11:00, 12:00

Kristallnacht -

Tape I 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, 15:00

Ghetto Life (Lithuania) -

Tape II 6:00, 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 13:00, 14:00

Escape from the Ghetto and in hiding -

Tape II 17:00, 18:00, 19:00, 20:00, 21:00

Tape III 1:00, 2:00, 3:00

"Righteous" Gentiles -(includes t'e Bishop of Canterbury who spoke out)

Tape II 19:00, 20:00, 21:00

Tape III 9:00

August 22, 1991

JEWISH COMMUNITY FEDERATION OF RICHMOND

Name: Israel Ipson

Date of interview: Not marked on tapes

Israel tells of his dismal efforts to hold a job just before war broke out even though he was quite educated. He speaks of life in the ghetto and how he eventually survived the war living in a friendly farmer's potato pit. He speaks often of his wife and son, Jay. He mentions his daughter only once early in his story and never speaks of her again.

Israel Ipson was born in Kovno (ph), Lithuania, March 15, 1911.

- 1:00 Israel wants to be called "Izzy". He was born in ~~Kownus~~ <sup>Kaunas</sup> (ph). It's called ~~Kownus~~ <sup>Kaunas</sup> in Jewish. It's Kovno, Lithuania. He lived in a suburb called Slabutki (ph). There was a famous Slubutki Yeshiva. He went to public school in 1922. Then he went to Hebrew high school. Since Jews weren't so free, this was a private high school. He graduated in 1928.
- 2:00 He registered at the University of Lithuania. He graduated from the law school in 1933. He joined the bar but couldn't practice law after 1935 because of the Nazi influence. He and the other young Jewish lawyers were told they'd have to pass another exam. There was a justice minister (what we call an attorney general) by the name of Zeilingus (ph). There were about 500 of the young Jewish lawyers and they couldn't get a place to work. There were 50 civil courts, 2 district courts, and 1 supreme court. The Lithuanians got jobs first. The Jews were told, "No vacancies."
- 3:00 So, Izzy had to think of another job. He said Jews weren't allowed in business either. In 1935 - 1936, slogans were going around that said, "Buy from Lithuanians." They didn't say (6:00) "Don't but from Jews" as the Germans did. They said it in a nicer way. Izzy was married and had a son Jay, and had to make a living. He decided to be an accountant but now Jews couldn't do this work either. Izzy managed to hold one job and one day the owner told him to take a deposit to the government bank in (7:00) Slabutki. He had a beat up motorcycle for travelling to the university.

- 4:00 He took the money to the bank and across the street was the government department. A friend of his who was in the building saw him drive up on his motorcycle. He told Izzy he had good news for him. He told him to write letters to motorcycle manufacturers in America and England to get an agency. His motorcycle was an FN (Fabrique Nationale (ph)). Izzy wanted to be an agent for this company in Lithuania. He had no money but borrowed some to begin buying and selling motorcycles.
- 5:00 In 1937, a factory asked him to come to Berlin. He came back with 3 motorcycles. In 1938 he returned as he had family in Berlin. His mother asked him to take a goose and cheese to his aunt. The men in his family said he shouldn't have come.  
(12:00) There was a riot expected because Herszel Grynszpan had killed an ambassador in Paris. He killed him because the Nazis had thrown his father out of Germany and he had to go to Poland.
- 6:00 This was the Kristallnacht. Izzy stayed at home with his cousin. Someone knocked at the door and said - "Are Jews here?" Izzy said he was a Lithuanian named Israel. All the male Jews in Germany had to have the name Israel and all the female Jews, Sarah. He was lucky not to be locked up. He saw fire all night and was scared. Glass was everywhere, and Jewish stores were destroyed.  
(15:00)
- 7:00 Izzy walked to the synagogue that was burned. He said it was just an accident that he happened to be in Berlin on Kristallnacht. He got home and never went back to Berlin because the war started September 1, 1939. When Izzy was walking through the destruction of Kristallnacht, he was afraid. He was lucky because he looked German and no one bothered him. Many Jews hid after that night.  
(18:00)
- 8:00 On Kristallnacht, he heard all the noise and saw the flames. All the Jewish bookstores were burned. Izzy said when he had been in Berlin in 1937, his cousin took him to a beautiful restaurant called Hausvaterland, but there was now a sign that said "Juden Verboten." He went to the Berlin Zoo in 1937 and he saw Goering "face to face." Also, Hitler was speaking that day by the Reichstag, but Izzy stayed away.
- 9:00 Izzy's family happened to be in Berlin because after WW I, workers were needed and his family was poor. (This is how he came to take them food that night). When Izzy saw Goering, he didn't think that much of it. He thought the Germans were nice people. This all happened in 1937 before he returned in 1938 on Kristallnacht. He had heard and read that Hitler asked the Jews to get out, but he didn't dream there'd be a Holocaust.

- 10:00 In high school he had read about Goethe and Schiller and Loesing so he still thought Germans were nice people. There was even a German Jew in his high school who brought in German culture. On the day that he went to the zoo in Berlin and Hitler was at the Reichstag, he said thousands of people were screaming. He would then listen to the short wave radio and Churchill would speak. The first time Izzy heard of Hitler was when he was in Berlin in 1937. In 1938, when he returned in the summer, he heard Hitler had annexed Austria.
- 11:00 Izzy met a man whose bicycle plant was closed down. This man wanted Izzy to give him connections to the FN plant in Lithuania. He would open a plant and give Izzy a good job. Izzy went from Slabutki after lunch to meet him in Kownus. This was a sunny day in August. Many Jews were walking in the street. It was beautiful. All of a sudden shouting came that Hitler invaded Poland.
- (29:00)
- 12:00 In a second, everything changed - like a cloud came down. Izzy still went to see the man. The man told Izzy he already bought the factory and sold it. He said he and his wife were leaving Lithuania because of Hitler. Izzy said whatever he started, he couldn't finish because of the approaching war. He tried to be a lawyer, an accountant, and now lost a chance to get a better job at the FN plant from the man who was going to flee the Nazis.
- (32:00)
- 13:00 The Communists came in and took all Izzy had after Hitler and Stalin made a pact. In April 1933 Hitler called a boycott, a state sanctioned boycott against Jewish businesses. Izzy was in Kownus.
- 14:00 Before Communists, many Jewish refugees came to Lithuania. The Nazis weren't there yet. The Jews were looking for a place to run. The Nazis were in Poland. Izzy got involved helping them emigrate. The only place they could go now was Japan and Izzy helped them fill out the papers. Then Hitler invaded Latvia. Lithuania was on the border of Poland. August 15, 1940 was when the Communists occupied Lithuania.
- (35:00)
- (36:00)
- 15:00 Back to Kristallnacht. Izzy said the Jewish people were like wounded animals. The police took many away and they were put in camps. Some tried to get out of Berlin. They had nowhere to go. They had no visas to go to the States. To go to Japan, they needed money. The poor went to Dachau and Theresienstadt.
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- 16:00 Izzy heard the words "concentration camp" on the radio for the first time. On June 22, 19? (cannot understand the date).
- (43:00) Izzy heard a bomb. The airport was not far from Slabutki and the Germans had dropped a bomb. It was 6 A.M.

- 17:00 It woke Izzy up. The police came and took his car. On the radio it was announced that Hitler declared war against Stalin. The Red Army started retreating. At this time, Izzy was working for the Hatel (ph); it was a transport firm. When Stalin came in, he had nationalized all businesses.
- 18:00 Izzy was the bookkeeper for the Hatel. He took his wife and Jay and his little girl (he had a daughter now) in a horse and wagon that belonged to the corporation he worked for and said (47:00) he was going to Moscow. From Slabutki to the Russian border was about 100 miles. Everybody was rushing to the Russian border to get away from the Nazis. Planes were overhead and shooting started. They had to stop because the Germans were right in front of them so they had to go back. Then the pogroms started. There were 2 ways to go back - through Kownus or by a country road. The people who took the country road, which Izzy did, made it.
- 19:00 Those who went through Kownus didn't make it. Everyone was shot. They had to dig their own graves. He made the right decision. (50:00) His father-in-law was so happy Izzy made it and ran to meet them. His father-in-law had black hair when Izzy left and it turned white. He told Izzy they had a terrible pogrom. All the Jews on Ubaka (ph) Street were killed. It was about 10 blocks long. The Lithuanians went door to door and killed everyone. They cut off the rabbi's head and put it on his dresser. The newspaperman, named Yakunski (ph), and his wife, a dentist, and their little boy were killed, too, as Izzy recalls. In another house was a plumber named Friedman.
- 20:00 He was a healthy man. He was cut up in pieces. Izzy's father-in-law hid in the attic. The blacksmith next door was killed. This was the Lithuanian civil police killing the Jews. They took the law into their hands. The pogrom was at night. Some Jews were taken to bury the dead in one grave. After they were finished, they were shot. Izzy said as far as his family, they leased a house with a store. They lived in the back. The woman, running the store had a boyfriend who was Lithuanian so he told them to skip this house. Izzy's mother, father, sister and her husband were living there.
- 21:00 They survived until they got into the ghetto. May 28th the Germans came in. Before they came, the Lithuanians were killing all the Jews. They took Jews to a service station. There was a fence around it and they locked a bunch of Jews in, poured kerosene all over and dropped a match to it and burned everyone. One hundred Jews were burned alive in Kownus. Then there were orders that Jews couldn't walk on sidewalks, only in the streets. A famous rabbi came to Izzy and said, "You speak good German. (58:00) I want you to do one thing." A man named Jordan (ph) was in charge of the Gestapo and was giving all the directives in Kownus.

22:00 Izzy talked to the rabbi about the story of Esther and how Hamen was trying to kill the Jews.

Tape II

1:00 Izzy tells the story of Esther and how Hamen tried to kill all the Jews. He relates this to Jordan the Gestapo who said all Jews would have to go to a ghetto.

(3:00) 2:00 A rabbi named Lipsitz (ph), came to Izzy to ask him to take a proposition to Jordan. He tells Izzy about a beautiful, married young woman who would be willing to be Jordan's mistress to convince him he shouldn't kill the Jews. Her husband agreed. Izzy had to hear it from the couple before he'd go to Jordan. He was scared, but went.

(7:00) 3:00 He got to the door that had a swastika and told the guard he wanted to see Jordan. The guard didn't believe him. He yelled, "Juden, raus!" Izzy ran. Jordan said by August 20th, all Jews had to be in the ghetto. It was in Slabutki where Izzy lived. It was a poor section. Lithuanians from there were swapped with the Jews from Kownus. There were 55,000 Jews so there was a large ghetto and a small ghetto connected by a bridge.

(2:00) 4:00 There were 2 gates to go in and out to go to work. On Sept. 1, an order came that 500 young Jews were needed to work in the archives. The mayor of Kownus gave the order; he was Lithuanian. They were to be gathered by 7:00 A.M. the next day. It was in front of Izzy's house. Izzy's friends tried to convince him to go. Something told Izzy to walk away. There were 534 young men from 18 - 50 years old.

(10:30) 5:00 There were doctors, engineers, lawyers and accountants - all the best. Everyone of them was killed. A policeman tried to grab him, but Izzy was only 29 and very strong. He tore the policeman into pieces. Izzy survived.

6:00 There was the small ghetto and the large ghetto because there were 55,000 people. A wooden bridge connected the 2 ghettos. The Germans decided that everyone in the small ghetto should have working papers. A week after that, 10,000 people from the small ghetto had to meet and be divided into groups according to where they'd go to work. Izzy's sister was living in the small ghetto. His mother started crying to bring his sister to the large ghetto. Izzy's wife went over the bridge and brought her over to the large ghetto at the last second.

(16:30) 7:00 All those people were taken and killed. The sick, the children, the old. Nobody from the small ghetto survived. Russian prisoners dug the graves. This was September 10, 1941.

8:00 On October 28, 1941 the large ghetto had a selection. Many tricks were used. The Jews were told they'd go to work. There were 27,000 Jews. At 5:00 A.M. they had to be on a big farm-like place. They were kept 2 hours and sent home. There were too many Jews for the Germans at that time and they were afraid of rebellion. A week later the same thing happened. No one could stay at home or they'd be killed. The healthy had to carry the sick on beds and chairs. It was terrible. It was October and snowing. Izzy says he still dreams at night about it.

9:00 Everyone had to stand in family groups and have a spokesman. In Izzy's group was his mother, father, sister, her child, his wife's father and mother, and his wife's grandmother who was 75 years old. Also, his wife's sisters. There were 20 people in his group. The Gestapo were at a long table asking names and occupations. They went to the right or left. To the right was  
(21:50) back to the large ghetto; to the left was to the small ghetto. Each group had a spokesperson and Izzy was it for his family. The whole group would go to the right or left together. Rokka (ph) was the head of the Gestapo there and Izzy mentions this man was caught in Canada a few years ago. He had asked Izzy his occupation and Izzy's mind had to work a mile a minute. He wondered if he should say he was a lawyer or automobile mechanic. He felt he should say he was a mechanic. He really only knew about motorcycles.

10:00 So, Rokka screamed for Izzy's group to go right. A man in front of him said he was a teacher and he went to the left to the small ghetto. He saw his school principal and others he knew  
(24:30) go to the left. Everyone who went to the left, 11,500 Jews, were killed. Two did escape and that's how Izzy found out.

11:00 A week later all the Russian police were killed. A German had Izzy's number for him to be an auto mechanic. He was scared to death. He was the only Jew in the garage. The German said something was banging in his car. Izzy said he'd lie on the ground and for the German to drive slowly over him and he'd see what it was. Izzy heard a click in the pipe. He moved the pipe and saw the universal joint was loose. Izzy said he'd fix it the next day because he had to figure out what to do.

12:00 The German said if he fixed it that day, he'd give him a half a loaf of bread. He said \$10,000 wouldn't mean as much. So, Izzy thought he'd use a screwdriver and a pipe wrench which were two common tools. He didn't know what he was doing, but he'd be taken to the Gestapo and shot if they found out he'd lied about being a mechanic. He turned 4 little bolts and took out the universal joint. The German was surprised he could do that. Izzy said it was just loose. He put on a new joint and it was  
(31:00) perfect. The German told the foreman Izzy was the best mechanic there was and to make him a foreman. Izzy also got the bread. There was little food and everyone was hungry.

- 13:00 They invented things for food, such as grass for salad. In the ghetto, his whole family lived in his father-in-law's house.  
(33:00) There were 2 rooms and a kitchen - 9 people lived here. There was no hope when they saw all that was going on. Izzy said life was worthless. The Germans wanted to send 2,000 people from the ghetto to Riga, Latvia to work.
- 14:00 His wife's family was first on the list. It was her father, mother, a sister and 2 brothers. The Gestapo came one day and said, "Let's go!" Izzy asked the Gestapo what was going on. He said he'd be there, too. Izzy's mother-in-law came up to ~~hand~~ shake hands good-bye and the German knocked her on the ~~head~~ with a rifle butt. They were taken away and his wife went crazy and said she shouldn't have let them go. His wife had an uncle who had a large farm. The uncle didn't go to the ghetto.
- 15:00 The uncle was protected and he's now 94 years old and living in Israel. Izzy worked at the airport as a mechanic. One day he committed a crime. He traded something for food. The inspector was checking the floor, kicked the package, and found the food. He called Izzy a saboteur. He went for his pistol and Izzy ran. The man shot at him. Izzy ran back to the ghetto.  
(32:00)
- 16:00 Izzy said the worst place to work was at the airport in Lithuania because of the runways. He was hit by a rifle butt one day, turned to see who hit him and his hand got caught under a saw and cut 2 fingers off. He had been building a wooden runway. He stopped the bleeding with wire and worked on. One day  
(42:00) Izzy was talking to a farmer who brought gravel for the runway. Izzy asked where he was from. He said a place where Izzy's uncle was.
- 17:00 The farmer said the man was in hiding. Izzy asked the farmer to take a note to him. The farmer came back in 2 weeks and had an answer. The uncle said he lost everybody and would try to get Izzy out. At 11:00 one night, October 26, 1943, Izzy cut the wire by the ghetto gate. He put 7 year old Jay out first.
- 18:00 Jay was put in a wagon and Izzy put on the farmer's coat. The farmer took Izzy, his wife and Jay into his house. They were to lay quietly over the large oven. This wasn't safe so they went to the farmer's sister about 5 or 6 blocks away.
- 19:00 The farmer, in the meantime, had to look for another place as the Gestapo were at his house. He ran to tell his sister. His sister's husband was so scared the Gestapo would find Izzy and his family in his house, he threw Jay and Izzy's wife out. They thought they'd go into the woods. The farmer showed him how to put his ear to the ground to tell which way someone was coming from. They all ended up hiding in a potato pit. This is a  
(52:00) large pit where farmers keep their potatoes in the winter. This farmer had 2 pits. He was poor and had no potatoes. His wife's uncle had a connection with this man and he kept them.



- 20:00 His name was Patzkowski (ph). Izzy wanted to buy the pits. Izzy gave him his suit for the pits. He said he'd give Izzy some bread and bones, too. At night, Izzy dug the pits bigger. One of the pits collapsed on him. The house was 500 feet away and he didn't know what to do. The farmer had a German Shepard and Izzy became "buddy-buddy" with it since he had a worse life than the dog! When the farmer gave bones to Izzy, he'd give the dog his leftover bones. He told the dog to go get Patzkowski.
- 21:00 The dog disappeared but couldn't get in the house. It came back to Izzy. The farmer had a 17 year old son and he was coming  
(57.00) home about 4:00 A.M. after playing a violin at a party. The dog saw him coming and went to him. He brought the boy to Izzy who dug him out. The dog saved his life.

Tape III

- 1:00 By the end, there were 16 people in the pit. The Germans started going back; the Russians started chasing them. You were between the two so you had to be below ground.
- 2:00 Izzy had had to disappear when he left the ghetto. He had 2 places in mind. He would go into the potato pit or dig himself a grave in the cemetary because nobody went there. He preferred the pits because he had the dog and the farmer, and he could go  
(3.00) out at night to get food. In the country the farmers kept their food in a deep well in the summer because it was cool and they had no refrigeration. It was 10 feet deep. In it was butter, cheese and meat. Izzy would take a little and leave a note that he was sorry, he was hungry, and he had to take it and that one of these days he might be able to give it back. He spent 9 months in the pit.
- 3:00 There was no air; they had to breathe through a 5 inch pipe. A bucket was their toilet. Izzy's uncle was also in the pit and he was a religious man who taught Jay and his own 2 boys the alphabet. There were lice. Izzy said it was the worst thing. If you washed a shirt, they got in it and "ate you up alive." Izzy talks of his family. The Gestapo had come and cut Kownus in half. They could destroy the Jews better in small groups. They opened another ghetto called the Sunsallager (ph).
- 4:00 They needed a head of that ghetto. It was to be Izzy's brother-in-law. They got Izzy's sick father into Sunsallager. After this ghetto was open a week, they had a selection of old people and children. Izzy's sister was at work. Izzy's mother was at home with his father and his sister's little boy. A truck drove up and took his father and the little boy, but not his mother. Izzy had another sister in Kownus.

- 5:00 His mother and sister got back to the Kownus ghetto. A cousin found Izzy's hiding place and told him what happened to his family. He asked him to take his brother into hiding. Izzy said he would if the cousin would bring his mother and sister. The cousin had come on a bicycle and said he would do it. The cousin came back with his brother but not Izzy's mother and sister. The cousin said they weren't ready. The cousin said he'd get his mother and sister, but he wanted to bring his brother's girlfriend. Izzy had to agree.
- 6:00 The cousin said now his mother and sister had been locked up. The cousin came back with another brother and his wife, but not Izzy's mother and sister. They were out of jail and the cousin said he'd bring them now. He came back this time with Izzy's aunt, his mother's sister. Izzy was upset. His aunt felt bad as she didn't know. She said she'd go back and bring Izzy's mother and sister. This time the cousin had a horse and wagon to get them. The horse lost a shoe and he had to stop at a blacksmith. A farmer, Malchuk (ph), said he'd take the horse and fix it up. The cousin would take one of the farmer's horses. So, he came to Ziersmal (ph), a market place. He saw 3 Lithuanian soldier volunteers with rifles. He thought they were going to lock him up.
- 7:00 The cousin and his mother (Izzy's aunt) jumped into a pile of hay. The 3 men ran after them and put them in jail. The next day he and his mother were shot. Izzy said to this day he feels guilty. The cousin's brothers now live in Canada and they still call Izzy. His mother and sister hid in the ghetto at a hiding place of a man named Monger (ph). The first thing Izzy did when he was liberated was to run to the ghetto but he found nothing. He doesn't know what happened to his mother, father, and 2 sisters. He later had a good position in Munich and asked thousands of people and nob dy had heard about them.
- 8:00 Izzy was asked if there was one thing people should remember from that experience, what would it be? He said the selections - who should live and who should die - to the right and to the left. The left is death and the right is life. Izzy said all are created equal and everyone has the same right to live. The killing should be stopped and love should be spread. He said the biggest school is life and people learn in their own way. People need to be educated that if they're going the wrong way, they need to be put back on track. There's plenty room for everybody. Izzy was asked if there was anything else that should be talked about that really stood out in his mind. He said back when he lived in the ghetto and worked at the Waffmeisterei (ph) cleaning ammunitions, there was a captain and 2 German Gestapo with a short wave radio. When they went to lunch they took 2 hours.
- (13:00)

- 9:00 Izzy would go into their office and listen to the Bishop of Canterbury from London. He used to beg the Pope to please speak up and say that Hitler should stop killing the Jews. The bishop asked the Pope for an answer and there never was one. A person in the Pope's position should have been a spiritual leader to love each other, not to hate each other. By his not speaking up, he hated the Jews. Why? A person's a person, it (22:00) doesn't matter what they think about Jesus. The interviewer had one more question about the day Izzy was liberated. Izzy was hiding between Vilnius and <sup>Kaunas</sup> Kownus, 2 large cities. The Red Army liberated Vilnius and was going to Kownus. He could hear the Kartoosa (ph). They rumbled closer and closer.
- 10:00 Izzy knew the front was coming closer. A day or 2 later, Patzkowski, the farmer, went to the market and came back and told Izzy he saw thousands of German soldiers retreating. Izzy stuck out his head and saw Russian soldiers. They were (24:00) trying to encircle the Germans. Izzy couldn't believe he could go out. One soldier came and told Izzy he was looking for his brigade. He lost his soldiers. Izzy just couldn't believe he could come out of the pit. He started kissing his wife and everyone. The biggest problem was the German soldiers had been brewing liquor near Kownus as they knew the Russians liked to drink. The Russians started drinking and the Germans killed thousands of them. They stopped there a week in which time Kownus could have been liberated.
- 11:00 Ten thousand Jews could have survived in <sup>Kaunas</sup> Kownus. From there the Russians went to Dachau. Only 500 Jews survived. Izzy was running behind the Russian soldiers. This was in 1944; the war ended May 2, 1945. In 1944, he was free. He got into Kownus (27:00) and it was a ghost city. It had been a big city before of 400,000 people. He walked into the prime minister's apartment and the coffee was still on the table. They had all run away. Izzy went looking in the ghetto for his mother. He said it's so painful to talk about and that's why survivors didn't speak about it for years.
- 12:00 They want to forget. Now they're doing it for future generations.