

Has video in Archive  
gave indiv. tape.

AARON ELSTER-ORAL HISTORY  
ONE BRIEF EXPERIENCE RELATING TO MY SURVIVAL

LATE SEPTEMBER 1942, THE MORNING AFTER "YOM KIPPUR" MY MOTHER WOKE ME FROM A DEEP SLEEP AND SAID "GET DRESSED, WE MUST GO INTO OUR HIDING PLACE". ( A DOUBLE WALL IN THE ATTIC ) THE "SS" AND THE UKRANIAN POLICE WERE HERE TO LIQUIDATE THE GHETTO. A COLD SWEAT CAME OVER ME CAUSING UNCONTROLLED SHIVERING IN MY BODY. I KNEW THAT MEANT DEATH TO THE REMAINING JEWS IN OUR TOWN. COMMOTION FILLED WITH CRYING AND MUDDLED PRAYER ONLY INTENSIFIED MY SHAKING IN THAT DARKNESS AS EVERY ONE WAS SCURRYING UP TO THE ATTIC INTO OUR HIDING PLACE. MY YOUNGER SISTER SARAH, MY MOTHER AND DAD PLUS ALL OUR NEIGHBORS AND THEIR CHILDREN SQUEEZED BEHIND THE DOUBLE WALL THAT WAS DESIGNED TO ACCOMMODATE HALF THE 40 PLUS PEOPLE.

THE GHETTO RESIDENTS WERE BEING ROUNDED UP, SOME SHOT IMMEDIATELY OTHERS CHASED UP TO THE MARKET PLACE WHERE THEY WERE SORTED, AND PUT ON A TRAIN TO BE MERCILESSLY KILLED IN TREBLINKA.

IN OUR HIDING PLACE THE SMALL CHILDREN SOON BEGAN TO CRY CAUSING A DILEMMA FOR THE REST OF THE GROUP. THE NOISE WOULD BE HEARD BY THE "GESTAPO" WHO WERE GOING THROUGH THE BUILDINGS LOOKING FOR JEWS. MOST WERE QUIETED BY THEIR MOTHERS BREAST WHILE ONE CHILD THAT COULD NOT BE QUIETED WAS SMOTHERED. WE WERE SOON DISCOVERED BY THE "SS" AND THEIR LOCAL LACKEYS (POLICE). SHOTS WERE FIRED INTO OUR HIDING PLACE KILLING SOME OF THE PEOPLE. SHOUTS OF "RAUS JUDEN" WERE MINGLED WITH SCREAMS AND PUSHING, KICKING TILL WE WERE ALL OUT AND LINED UP AGAINST THE OUTSIDE WALL OF OUR APARTMENT BUILDING.

MY MOTHER WAS SEPARATED FROM US. MY DAD WAS HURLED AGAINST THE WALL AS WERE THE REST OF THE MEN. MY LITTLE SISTER AND I RAN OVER TO MY FATHER. SOME OF THE INFANTS WERE RIPPED AWAY FROM THEIR PARENTS ARMS, SHOT OR BAYONETTED WHILE OTHERS NOT TOUCHED. WE WERE MARCHED UP TO THE MARKET PLACE AND LINED UP IN A SQUARE ALONG THE PERIMETER ALONG WITH OTHER RESIDENTS WHO WERE FOUND. A GUARD WAS PARKED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SQUARE WITH A MACHINE GUN GIVING HIM FULL VIEW OF THE MARKET PLACE AND ALL WHO WERE IN IT. GUARDS WERE ROAMING AROUND US FINISHING SOME OF THE ELDERLY IN THEIR VARIOUS STAGES OF DYING. DEAD BODIES MIXED WITH PIERCING SCREAMS OF "SHMAI ISRAEL" CREATED AN UNIMAGINARY HELL ON EARTH AND IN MY MIND I COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT I WAS PART OF THIS INFERNO WHILE THE SUN WAS OUT, THE SKY WAS BLUE AND GOD WATCHED HIS CHILDREN BE DESTROYED. MY FEAR OF DEATH, MOSTLY THE PAIN ASSOCIATED WITH DYING, WOULD NOT ALLOW MY SHAKING TO STOP. I KNEW OF THE GAS CHAMBERS, THE MASS GRAVES, THE SUFFOCATING CRUELTY OF BEING BURIED WHILE THERE WAS STILL LIFE IN YOU.

" OH GOD! WHY DID I HAVE TO DIE? WHAT UNSPEAKABLE CRIME DID I COMMIT? WHY DIDN'T GOD JUST SWALLOW UP THIS WHOLE INFERNO? THEM AND US. IT WOULD MAKE DEATH MUCH EASIER TO ACCEPT, KNOWING THAT THE MURDERERS WERE GOING INTO HELL WITH YOU. STILL MY PRAYERS FOR GOD TO SPARE ME. "PLEASE GOD I WANT TO LIVE! "SPARE ME". I WAS NO LONGER THINKING OF ANY ONE ELSE. BUT, THEN MY INNER VOICE WOULD SAY, "WHY WOULD GOD SAVE YOU" THERE ARE SO MANY

CHILDREN THAT HAVE BEEN SO MUCH MORE PIOUS THAN YOU! STILL I DIDN'T CARE, I WANTED TO LIVE! IF NOT, AT LEAST LET MY DEATH NOT BE SO PAINFUL.

MY TREMBLING AND CRYING NEVER DID SUBSIDE. MY FATHER WAS STILL SITTING NEXT TO MY LITTLE SISTER AND I. "DAD, WHAT SHOULD I DO?". "RUN! HE SAID, "SAVE YOURSELF"! ON MY STOMACH I INCHED MY WAY TO THE BACK OF THE CROWD TO THE OPEN SEWER AT THE END OF THE MARKET PLACE. INCH BY INCH I CRAWLED AWAY FROM THE VISION OF THE GUARDS. I STOOD UP AND BEGAN TO RUN. NOBODY CHASED ME, NO SHOTS WERE FIRED, WHY?. I RAN ABOUT TWO BLOCKS TO A HOUSE AT THE END OF THE GHETTO BY THE BARBED WIRE FENCE THAT SEPARATED THE GHETTO FROM THE GENTILE SIDE OF TOWN. THAT HOUSE BELONGED TO AN UNCLE OF MINE. INSIDE THE HOUSE I FOUND THE CELLAR DOOR WHICH WAS COVERED WITH A SMALL AREA RUG. ENTERING THE CELLAR, I FOUND AN AUNT AND HER 6 YEAR OLD DAUGHTER WERE STILL HIDING THERE. I STAYED THERE THE REST OF THAT DAY AND NITE. NEXT MORNING I MADE A DECISION THAT WE COULDN'T STAY HERE, WE WOULD SOON BE DISCOVERED.

MY AUNT WAS TOO SCARED TO LEAVE. I CRAWLED OUT OF THE CELLAR INTO THE BACK YARD TOWARD THE BARBED WIRE FENCE. WITH MY SHORT PANTS AND MY OLDER SISTERS COAT I CRAWLED UNDER THE BARBED WIRE AND MADE IT ACROSS TO THE GENTILE SIDE OF TOWN.

MY NEXT 20 MONTHS WERE SPENT HIDING IN FIELDS, BARNS AND FINALLY IN AN ATTIC WERE MY OLDER SISTER WAS PLACED BY MY PARENTS WITH A GENTILE COUPLE.

MY NAME IS AARON ELSTER, I WAS LESS THAN 10 YEARS OLD WHEN I BEGAN MY LIFE IN HIDING IN AND AROUND SOKOLOW, PODLASKI, POLAND.