

RG-50.120*0001

3 Tapes

Raphael ("Rudi") and Rachel ("Bonya") Abrabanel

Tape 1/3

1:01 Raphael Abrabanel

Family Background

He is a descendent of famous Don Izchak Abrabanel family, who left Spain with the expulsion of the Jews and migrated via Italy, Greece to Macedonia and Serbia

1:06 He was born in Pirot, March 1920, spent most of his childhood in Brod, and at 14
Pirot East Serbia (1933) moved to Belgrad. Members of his extended Sephard family were
Brod west of Belgrad engaged in construction and trading and were economically comfortable.

1:15

1:18-1:20 The family was traditional/observant but not very Orthodox. Describes in detail their cultural and religious customs (There was a separate Ashkenaz; Jewish community in Belgrad).

Early years

socialist/zionist At age 13 he (and his sister) joined "Hashomer-Hatzair" youth movement which prepared its members to emigrate to Palestine. Describes in detail the activities, ideology, and structure of this movement. His parents accepted his ideological and social involvement, though they had no plans to migrate themselves.

1:25-1:48

War years

1:50-1:59 Initial rumor re events in Germany were not believed. Most Porod/Belgrade Jews did not believe it pertained to them. Information came mostly via youth movement leaders from Poland, who urged migration

end 2:02

(his own testimony continues in Tape 3)

Rachel Abrabanel (wife) Confino

2:03-2:08 Family Background

She was born in 1922 in Yugoslavia, as did her parents, and grandparents, family Confino (she is second-cousin to husband Raphael) until war lived in Brod (population +1000). The family (one of two Sephardi among 50 Jewish families) was traditional but not very religious. Initially poor, father eventually joined physician brother and then prospered.

2:09 At age 12, she joined "Hashomer-Hatzair" Socialist/Zionist youth movement where her cousin "Ruid" also was member and with her father's support, describes her involvement in its camping and scouting activities. At 14-15 left to join the Communist youth movement. Describes her social attachment to them.

2:10-2:20

Wartime Experiences

- 2:23 In 1940 "everything changed;" stories of refugee plight involved father, though most Jews in Brod did not believe it happen to them. Describes her participation
- 2:30-2:40 in a student revolt in response to a political replacement of the principal which ended in police arrest and delayed matriculation.
- 2:40-2:42 Describes April 1941 bombing and occupation of Brod by the Germans (shortly after her father was conscribed to Croatian army)
- Jews "identified" by Croats/Ustashi, had to wear yellow star and do forced labor. Some were turned over to Germans and later executed (says who)
- 2:42-3:04 She, her mother, and younger sister lived in their basement while German officers occupied their home. Describes their behavior, her mother's concerns, how her Communist friends helped. Also with papers to escape and unite with father in Pirot.
- End Tape 1/3
- Tape 2/3
- Rachel Abrabanel (continued from Tape 1/3)
- 3:04-3:10 In Pirot (annexed by Bulgaria) were reunited with discharged father, lived with relatives first in Jewish quarter, eventually outside in various living arrangements with more incoming relatives -- including Rudi -- in relative security.
- 3:34 Describes year of living under restricted conditions, night curfew. daily reporting to Bulgaria's police. Father traveled to Sophia relatives often.
- 3:38-3:54 Describes her connection with Communist groups who attempted to connect with partisans in the mountains. They were eventually discovered by police; interrogated, under torture, arrested for 3 months until the confessed. Father bribed her out. This was followed by home arrest.
- 3:58 March 12, 1943: Bulgarian police with Germans, broke into their house.
- 4:02-4:15 Her father, she, and sister jumped through the window and escaped while the mother and all others were rounded off for transport. Describes their dramatic escape, futile 3 day search for partisans, and eventual escape to Sophia.
- 4:26 Describes life in Sophia in semi-hiding, joined by relatives, mother and Rudi (who jumped off transport train (see Tape 3/3). Describes role of money (hidden gold) in arranging escapes, bribing and forging documents.
- 4:30-4:36
- 4:36 Escaped to Albanian border 4-day walk through mountains. Caught by Albanian police interrogated and interred.

4:42-4:58 Describes life in Albanian internment in detail with Italy's surrender, the hundreds of Jewish refugees in Skopie bought a boat to escape via Durazzo (Albanian port) to Bari, Italy.

5:05 Describes the terrible voyage and final rescue by partisans, into British camp

End of tape 2/3

Start tape 3/3 Raphael Abrabanel
3:03 (continued history from tape 1/3, 2:03)

3:17-3:26 Describes life in Belgrad at outbreak of war. Effects of German bombing. He describes his work in forced labor group under German control

Describes attempts to join Communist partisans and state of confusion.

3:40-3:56 In Pirot, initially situation calmer, but increasing Bulgarian oppression. Describes apprehension of family and Pirot Jews. March 1943 (see Rachel's story 2/3). Rachel's mother tortured in 3 day transport.

3:58-4:04 Describes his dramatic escape from the train and wandering through the city of Lom

4:05-4:10 Describes his escape from the train, through Lom to Sofia, all without documents ("but the leather jacket helped!") There he joined his family and other refugees.

4:16-4:23 Organized groups to leave for Albania, three-day nightly walk. They were betrayed, caught and interned.

4:27 Describes the Albanian attitudes to refugees and Jews.

4:33-4:43 When Germans replaced the surrendering Italian he and other posed as Moslem Albanians; forging of documents

4:44-4:51 Feb '44; they escaped by boat (which was smuggling out Italian officers) from Lake Port.

4:51 Describes the terrible 3 day voyage, the refugees hiding in hold, storm

4:57 Rescued by Italian fisherman, partisans, and eventually landed in British transit camp for refugees in Bari.

4:57-5:07 Describes eventual immigration to Palestine and settling in Kibbutz.

End Tape 3/3