

RG-50.120\*13

**Berlinsky, Hella**

**Tape 1 of 7**

- 1.01 Born (Klieger) in 1919 in a small town and moved to Lodz as an infant. The family was observant, but not orthodox. She was next to the youngest with five brothers and three sisters. Her father, though ordained as a rabbi, was a businessman in a large family-owned knitting enterprise.
- 1.24 She describes a warm busy household in a Jewish environment, supporting Jewish charities. Her Hebrew-speaking older brothers were involved in business and some were active in a Zionist organization. When father died in 1936, economic hardships curtailed activities and delayed immigration to Palestine. In March 1939, she married Jacob Berlinsky who was also from a large family – he was involved in the knitting industry and active in the Zionist-socialist youth movement. She describes the Jewish community and life in Lodz. There were Polish anti-Semites and the considerable German population (60,000?) related to the extensive Lodz knitting industry.
- 1.56 Describes the Germans' entry into Lodz on September 3, 1939. Talks about the destruction, bombardment and confusion. The Germans took over apartments, property and factories. Her brothers and husband escaped to Warsaw. She went to a family in Klopshtock (nearby) with her mother and sisters. She explains that they were betrayed by Volksdeutsche and Poles. The Gestapo was searching for people, especially for her Socialist husband.
- 2.30 Describes a three-day trek to Strenovitche in search of a brother who was found in a hospital and the hordes of deported Jews she saw on the roads.

**Tape 2 of 7**

- 3.30 In January 1940, she arrived in Piotrkow, 40 km. east of Lodz, where she spent the next year and a half, and another year in its surrounding (in the Karo workshops – industries).

Following is six hours of especially disorganized and repetitive testimony of this period, which is summarized very briefly:

Piotrkow was the first ghetto established by the Germans in Poland (and the last to close). She describes the town's pre-war Jewish population and the influx and chaos of refugees coming and leaving; the Jewish community and its functionaries with their different party affiliations and their relationships with the Germans, (names); her work with incoming refugees in the Jewish community; people of different backgrounds; typhoid epidemic at the end of 1941. A "little ghetto" was established and they were living in a bunker. The Germans were rounding up and selecting Jews for daily quota for deportation. Her husband was deported to Auschwitz in July 1942. She was eventually employed in the "shops" sewing clothes for S.S. wives (they were made of prayer shawls and other looted

materials). She was among the few who had a work permit which saved her from deportation. She moved to Karo with sister and her child, repeatedly refusing offers to escape in order to stay with them. She describes the two Karo glass factories and lumberyards, and the work unloading construction material from railroad cars and seeing those deported to Treblinka. Talks about executions of those arrested in the woods; children were deported to Blegin ??; her younger brother was killed. Talks about atrocities and betrayals by Jews, but especially by Volksdeutsche. The Poles' anti-Semitism was the worst. She describes Cherkesian-Russian prisoners of war guarding them; the cohesiveness of her group of women inmates who kept their spirit (demonstrates their songs) compared to others; her treatment when she became sick from work with the help of Vogel, the Volksdeutch manager of Karo.

- 9.20 In November 1944, she knew that the end was near. She resisted escape offers in order to stay with her sister. Women were separated from the men and herded into train cars for a four-day trip to Feurstenberg and then a walk to Ravensburg camp (80 miles north of Berlin).

### **Tape 3 of 7**

- 9.30 Describes arrival on November 26 with gypsy and other Polish prisoners; the procedure of cleansing and gynecological exams. The 247 Jewish women from Piotrkow with 19 children were put into Block #12. Describes interior and food (later, block #23 was much worse). Also talks about hard labor in expanding the camp for thousands more women prisoners; unloading supplies from trains that arrived at Fuerstenberg station and transported them by carts pulled by pairs of women "horses" who were beaten if they fell behind. She became sick and describes the risks of clinic treatment. She was transferred to a sewing job in the workshop – she couldn't keep up with Ukranian and others and was punished. Her sister became sick and interned in the life-risking clinic so she snuck away after her nightshift work to give her some bread. Stealing and bartering for food were common. As she was not identified as Jewish she was able to see the camp's surroundings and the S.S. officer quarters. She repeatedly tried to rejoin her recovered sister as the old lager was about to be liquidated and prisoners were transported with the approach of the Russian front. Describes a dramatic escape and hiding during inspections.

### **Tape 4 of 7**

- 11.45 These sections of the testimony are basically a repetition of the above Ravensburg experiences, but are much more detailed. In addition to descriptions of the many different groups of women prisoners and guards and the atrocities they committed, she tells about medical experiments (limb transplants, sterilizations, public executions, crematorium and gas chambers in the "Jugenlager." She mentions names of doctors and Nazi commandants. Talks about Himmler's visit and describes her work in the Dachauwerke and the famous Siemens factories.

### **Tape 5 of 7 ???**

- 14.35 With the approaching Russian front, prisoners were deported and she succeeded in sneaking into her sister's transport. They were herded 100 per car and traveled aimlessly for five days, stopping frequently. The S.S. guards disappeared. There was no food; filthy conditions; a woman gave birth and the umbilical cord was cut with the piece of glass that she always carried. They got off at Bergen and walked to the Bergen Belsen camp (March 1944).
- 14.40 Talks about the history of the camp, describes the layout and the mountains of corpses and hostile reactions by other prisoners upon their arrival. There were many different and shifting groups of prisoners, many from Auschwitz. She describes the hierarchy of supervisors and Block commanders and their behavior. She mentions their names. She tells about children, hunger, and an extensive typhoid epidemic.

### **Tape 6 of 7**

- 16.30 She cites the numbers of prisoners, corpses, and daily mortality at the time of liberation. She describes the heroic efforts of the entering British medical staff to deal with all of the dysentery and typhoid patients. Frantic efforts to locate relatives and refugees arriving from all sorts of places; treatment of Germans and thoughts about the meaning of revenge.
- 17.11 Soon after liberation she heard her husband was alive (escaped), but it took three months before he could get out of Poland to join her in Bergen Belsen. She tells the dramatic story of his escape from Auschwitz and the "death trek," hiding in the woods, posing as Polish and working for Volksdeutch. When the Russians arrived, a Jewish officer helped him get back to Lodz where he found the family property taken over by Poles and Volksdeutch. She describes their reunion.
- 18.02 She refused to return to Poland which she considered even more anti-Semitic than before and claims that she suffered more from them than from Germans. She describes visiting Berlin in search of relatives. They continued to live in the camp, which was full of refugees and sick people needing help. They became involved in the survivor organization. Her husband was active in aiding survivors to immigrate and was asked to delay their own settling in Palestine. After the initial post-war chaos, there developed a displaced persons active community with self-governing institutions with which they became involved. She also describes the contact with members of the Jewish Brigade, the Jewish Agency leaders and delegates from Palestine. A daughter was born to them (among 1,500 post-war children born in the camp). Relatives settled in Palestine. Her husband traveled because he was so active in the survivor organizations. They visited Israel briefly in 1950, but returned and only left Germany finally in August 1951. During the last year in Bergen Belsen, she was called upon to testify in trials of concentration camp commanders.

**Tape 7 of 7**

20.01 She describes settling in Israel, and the initial social adjustment and economic difficulties. She tells about the hostile and humiliating attitude they encounter as refugees, and how they felt isolated. Eventually, conditions improved. She describes their daughter's development and their pride in their success as an officer. Her husband died two years ago. She continued their activities in the Bergen Belsen survivor organization. She emphasizes the stature, value and contributions of survivors to the Israeli population.