

BLATT, Leon
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5 Videotapes

Abstract

Leon Blatt was born into a well-to-do family on April 1, 1919 in Katowice (Kattowitz, Stalinogród), Poland. He was active in Zionist youth organizations. He was due to go to Palestine on September 3, 1939, but war broke out September 1. Leon, his father, and his sister went to stay with Leon's grandfather in Bedzin (Bendin, Bendzin), while his mother and brother remained in Katowice until spring 1940, when transports began. After the Germans arrived in Bedzin, the Blatts moved to Sosnowiec (Sosnovets, Sosnovice, Sosnovits, Sosnovitz, Sosnovyets, Sosnowiec Niwka).

Leon became a leader of the underground Zionist movement. When they learned in 1941 that some ghetto residents were being deported to Auschwitz, they tried to move people across the Poland-Slovakia border. Leon hit a Judenrat guard in the head with an iron pipe to help save a man from being sent to a labor camp.

Leon was captured and sent to a labor camp. He escaped from Gross-Masselwitz and returned to the Sosnowiec Ghetto, where he worked at a carpentry factory. In the second half of 1942, Leon traveled secretly to contact a Polish partisan and obtain weapons so he and others would not "walk like sheep to slaughter in Auschwitz."

They also found a way to send some Jews to Vienna and then to Switzerland. Leon sneaked out of the Sosnowiec Ghetto and traveled to Budapest. He was active in bringing Jews to Budapest, and also finding a smuggler to bring the Polish Jews stranded in Vienna. He was appointed to the rescue committee in Budapest. Then, he tried to convince the Jews in Hungary to flee to Romania.

Leon was sent to a work camp. He was taken to the Gestapo despite changing his identity and physical appearance -- an operation that reversed his circumcision. He was interrogated for three days before admitting his identity. He was taken to Auschwitz I. He escaped from the death march, went to Katowice, then to Sosnowiec.

He was chosen to head the Jewish community, and oversaw distribution of food and housing for survivors. He helped Jews get to Palestine, Aliyah "B", and decided not to go to Palestine. He left Poland in May 1945. He lived in Germany among non-Jews for 25 years. He says that any survivors who can't build a mental "wall" to put the Holocaust behind them, can't live a normal life.

Interview Tape 1

Leon Blatt was born on April 1, 1919 into a “petit bourgeois” family in Katowice (Kattowitz, Stalinogród) on the Polish-German border. The city had heavy industry, particularly coal mining. This region of Poland was called “Little America”, because its population was relatively wealthy. The city had a German-Jewish population of 1,500-2,000, which increased gradually to 10,000 because eastern Polish Jews migrated there for better economic opportunities.

Jewish institutions included an elementary school, an elaborate synagogue, and a kosher kitchen for needy Jews. The largest of several Zionist organizations in Katowice was HaNoar HaTzioni (Ha-Noar Ha-Tzioni, Hanoar Hatziyyoni). At around age 13, Leon started going to HaNoar HaTzioni, until his parents forbade him to go because his father saw a girl there whose family were communists. He briefly joined Betar (Beitar). At that time, 1935, Jabotinsky stayed in Katowice. Leon talks in detail about the Zionist youth organizations.

In 1939, Leon and two others from Katowice, Janek Zimmerman (Cimerman, Cymmerman, sp?) and Zvi Rosenzweig, earned student certificates for the university after taking Hebrew tests in Krakow. This gave them the ability to emigrate to Palestine. Leon had had a religious education for much of his childhood, as his father wanted.

Leon’s father was a fabric merchant, employing 18 agents. His father was wealthy enough to buy a house, which still exists in Katowice. Later, he switched to the furniture business. His mother was a very smart woman who gave people sound advice on solving their problems. His younger brother died in Auschwitz. His younger sister survived, and lives in the United States. Leon mentions that his family was so wealthy that his parents wanted to buy him a car in 1938 so he could travel to France to study medicine. But he declined because he was busy with the Zionist youth movement.

He had heard what was going on in Germany as early as 1933. He had attended a German school for nine years. It had many German Jews, but no other Polish Jews. The Zionist movement pressured the Jewish community to leave Katowice and go to Palestine. Leon’s father even bought land there, in Afula. With Leon’s student certificate, he was supposed to emigrate to Israel on September 3, 1939, but the war began on September 1.

Leon talks briefly about his post-war life. He studied law in Germany, but didn’t complete his degree. He reflects on this and other decisions. After the war, he lived in Germany, among non-Jews, for 25 years. He says that any survivors who can’t build a mental “wall” to put the Holocaust behind them, can’t live a normal life afterward.

Back to 1939; until the end of August 1939, he was in a summer camp called Skava, where he was the administrative principal. The summer camp, run by his Zionist organization, had children from many cities in the area of Silesia. He talks about the summer camp, and their relations with nearby branches of the movement. Leon played ice hockey; Katowice had the first artificial ice rink in Poland. He talks about sports teams among the Zionist organizations, the rivalries, etc.

At the outbreak of war, Leon, his sister, and his father went to Bedzin (Bendin, Bendzin), a nearby predominantly Jewish city, where his grandfather lived. His mother and brother stayed in Katowice until April or May 1940.

Leon describes his first encounter with German soldiers. In Bedzin's main square, the Germans were playing accordions and giving chocolates to children. When the Germans saw any bearded man and knew he was a Jew, they made him leave. Still, Leon and his family thought, "This isn't so bad." A 9:00 P.M. curfew was instituted.

The next day, the Waffen-SS threw bombs into the synagogue, burning it down along with nearby houses. They shot any man coming out of one of these houses. They did not shoot women. One man escaped by being wrapped in a blanket and carried out by his wife.

A few months later, the Blatts were joined in Bedzin by Leon's mother and brother, who fled Katowice when transports began in 1940. The Germans expropriated the Blatt's furniture store. The family moved to Sosnowiec (Sosnovets, Sosnovice, Sosnovits, Sosnovitz, Sosnovyets, Sosnowiec Niwka).

In Sosnowiec, Leon met someone he knew from home, Janek Zimmerman (Cimerman, Cymmerman, sp?), and joined the Zionist movement leadership. Others in the leadership in Sosnowiec were the Kozuch (Kozukh, Kouzek, Kozhuch?) brothers; Somek (Samek?) Meitlis (?); Karl (Karol?) Tuschneider; Motek (Mlotek?) Danziger and his brother; Lolka Pomeranc-Blumen (Pomerantzenblum?), who later married Somek. Together, they expanded the movement. Others in the movement were Janek's sister; Seve Kurland (?); Herta Friedler (?); Herta Friedler's brother; Mala Reich (?); Zela Scheuer (?). They were from Katowice.

The reason they had to flee Katowice, and the reason Sosnowiec was relatively safe, was that Katowice had once been a German city, while Sosnowiec had belonged to Russia prior to World War I. Eventually that region, valuable because it contained carbon, was taken by the Germans.

In Bedzin and Sosnowiec, Judenrats were formed. The head of the Bedzin Judenrat was Mochaska (sp?), and Merin in Sosnowiec. The work included ensuring that the children learned professions. Juzek Kozuch worked in the community, connected somehow to the Judenrat. This was agreed to by the Jews because they thought Kozuch's having that position could be useful to them. Sometimes it was, when he conveyed information about what was going to happen.

With help from Kozuch, Leon's family and other connected families were given a plot of land at the city's edge. The vegetables they grew helped sustain people in the community. Also, the plots were a safe meeting place for Jews.

Leon talks about Sosnowiec's kitchen for the needy located on Jassne (?) Street. Janek headed the kitchen, which was another meeting point. They organized a school for children. Leon taught German and math. Motek Danziger, basically the head teacher, taught many subjects. Leon and some others made an ice rink in the yard of a school on Deblinska (Demblinska?) Street, where Jews skated for free, and where more Zionist meetings took place. A woman named Halinka Goldblum was at one of the meetings.

Leon talks more about the agricultural plots they were given in Sosnowiec before the Jews were put into a ghetto. For two months, Leon was a nightwatchman over the plots to prevent Poles from stealing the vegetables. He had gotten special permission to be out after curfew. The supervisor of the plots was a Judenrat member named Weinrip (?), an agricultural expert, whose son belonged to

the Zionist youth movement. The Germans agreed to the plots because they agreed that Jews had to learn how to work.

Leon's Zionist movement was bigger than all others in the region combined. Leon mentions a Mr. Schwalbaker (?) as part of the relatively small leftist Zionist contingent in the region. Leon talks more about the politics among the various Zionist groups; *e.g.*, a coalition in Hungary of HaShomer HaTzair (HaTsair, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tzair) and HaMizrachi (Ha-Mizrachi) because of a man named Mr. Krausz (?). Two HaMizrachi members from Silesia (one of whom, Dov Abramchik (?), lived in France after the war) went with Leon to Hungary. He is not clear about dates. They eventually forged a compromise of sorts with the various Zionist groups.

Back to Sosnowiec in 1940: They were free to walk in the city, with the exception of one or two streets, but were forbidden to ride the tram. He talks more about their movement's school, and another teacher there named Steinberg.

Leon's parents supported themselves by selling pieces of their own gold to affluent people. In 1941, all the Blatts except for Leon's mother worked in factories for the Germans, and received a small salary. After the ghetto was established, Leon also made money by other means.

Leon tells the story of a friend, Alexander Glitsenstein (Gliezensztejn, Glitzenstein?), who died on August 3. He attempted constantly to fight the Germans, and was killed when trying to escape on the way to the train cars (unclear).

Leon sneaked out of the ghetto, although he risked death if caught, to bring flowers to his girlfriend on her birthday, and to make money. He would sneak out and go to the city to sell valuables, given to him by ghetto acquaintances. He sold them to a Polish friend whom he knew through Glitsenstein. Leon would get a portion of the profits ($\approx 10\%$). The ghetto was closed in 1941, probably in the second half of the year.

In 1941, the first relatively small groups of Jews from Sosnowiec were taken to Auschwitz. From the train workers, the Jews in Sosnowiec learned some of what went on at Auschwitz. Information was contained also in a letter delivered by one of the train workers. All this time, Juzek was the community's leader, and Leon met him daily in Sosnowiec. Juzek wrote letters to Switzerland, to people named Schwarzbaum (?) and Shnatan (?). Juzek went to Bedzin to farm, he was a "theoretician." Leon talks about the group's meetings, held with Juzek and his younger brother, Lolka, and Somek Meitlis, Janek Zimmerman, Karl Tuschneider, and Leon. They formed the leadership of their Zionist movement. Somek transferred people across the Poland-Slovakia border. He was captured on the border and killed.

They learned more about Auschwitz from a letter from a young woman named Tsuzenovska (?), who had been taken from the city. Leon thinks that Merin was responsible for her being taken away. They also saw trains filled with deportees from other countries (*e.g.*, Holland and Belgium), passing through on the way to Auschwitz. By 1942, there were transports from Sosnowiec to Auschwitz.

In the ghetto, the Germans required some Jews for work, so the Judenrat chose some Jews who had no "*protectsia*" (poorer, sick, or older people). Judenrat police arrested them at night, and they were sent to do forced labor. Merin approved, saying that those chosen might escape death this way. A few thousand young women were sent to work in spinning mills in Sudetenland, and many survived

the Holocaust because they were never sent to Auschwitz. Leon, and it sounds like the general community, were against the Judenrat's choosing people to send to forced labor. Leon says that the community should not be involved in sending the old and sick away to work.

One day in 1941, before the ghetto was established, all the Jews were told to stand in a soccer field, where they would receive new documents. Leon says "we" (he and some others) distributed to each house flyers that said not to go to the soccer field. They knew at that point that people were being sent to Auschwitz. The Judenrat held a meeting in the city's big auditorium, and denounced the flyers. They said it was better for everyone to go to the soccer field, otherwise they wouldn't get documents. Then, the Judenrat went after Leon and Hipek (Alexander) Glitsenstein, who was thrown out of his job as a nurse. When Glitsenstein was about to be sent to a labor camp, Leon and Janek hit the Judenrat guard over the head with an iron pipe; and ran away with Glitsenstein to the mountains. Glitsenstein couldn't return from the mountains for a while.

The Germans once told Merin to recruit the best young men to get documents and become firefighters ("Brandschutz"?) for the Germans. Leon and many others did this. But after the first training session, Leon did not trust them any more, and did not go back. The 200 to 400 people who did were, in fact, sent to labor camps, and most did not return.

Leon was captured once and taken to a labor camp, working on the Reichsautobahn (RAB) in Hermannsdorf, and later in Gross-Masselwitz (Masselwitz, Maslice). In Hermannsdorf, they felled trees, removed grass, and made room for the roads. Conditions in Hermannsdorf were not so bad, but they were much worse in Gross-Masselwitz, where some 1,000 Jews worked. Some 250 people lived in a single room, and the work was extremely hard. Leon sold packages of food he got from home, bought some clothes, and ran away from Gross-Masselwitz. He took a train to Opole (Oppein, Oppeln), walked some 10 kilometers, then traveled to Racibórz (Ratburg, Rathwor, Rathybor, Ratibor, Razibor), then to Zabrze (Hindenburg), and then walked 20 kilometers to the Sosnowiec Ghetto.

There, he got work at a carpentry factory named Skope (sp?) that made cabinets for the Germans. He had fled Gross-Masselwitz in September or October, and one month later, half the prisoners there were taken to Russia to dig trenches for the Germans, who by 1941 had invaded Russia. Very few of the former Gross-Masselwitz inmates returned from Russia.

Leon returns to the story of the assembly at the soccer field. He and his parents did not go, but almost everyone else did. Those who were "selected", mainly the elderly, were taken to three houses. Leon and others, including Janek Zimmerman and Lala (sp?) Zimmerman, a hospital nurse; Hipek Glitsenstein; Fredka (Fretka) Oxenhendler (Oksenhendler), who later married Juzek, all tried to save the people, especially their own family members. They saved everyone connected to the movement. The Jews then got a "J" stamped on their documents.

Afterward, they began to organize their movement as an underground movement. People were organized in threesomes, each with a commander. Leon thinks, but is not sure, that the Jews in both Bedzin and Sosnowiec were told to assemble on the same day. He talks about the hostile relationship between the community and Merin. They would put up their flyers, giving news about the war, in shops and factories where Jews worked, like factories making soldiers' uniforms.

They sent young women who didn't look Jewish to various towns, even as far as Wroclaw (Breslau, Bresslau), to mail letters containing news about what the Germans were doing and that they'd pay (?) for Auschwitz, etc. A girl named Meta Schwert (?) went as far as Vienna, where they picked up phone books. They sent letters to people whose sons had died in battle, and to others. The young women risked their lives doing this.

The movement's leaders never seriously considered rebelling against Merin. They did, however, think about eliminating some Germans, such as Stuman Firer (?), who sent Jews to labor camps. Once, Goebbels came to speak at the Markthalle, a 10,000-capacity auditorium in Katowice, and they traveled there in an attempt to harm or assassinate him. But he was too well-guarded, and they could not get into the auditorium.

In the second half of 1942, Leon was on the road very often -- several times in Czestochowa (Chenstchov, Chenstochov, Chenstokhov, Chestokhova, Tshenstokhov) in the Protectorate, and once in Miechow (Mekhev, Miechov, Myekhov) to make contact with a Polish partisan. Kozuch probably would have been against any attempted rebellion because it could not benefit the Jews. Many Jews, such as Jews working in the chimneys (?) were killed. And for both Kozuch and Leon, no action was worth risking retaliation on so many Jews.

Leon's mother was arrested after Leon beat up a policeman and could not be found. But when Leon threatened Kozuch with a gun, Leon's mother was released. Leon had hit the young policeman because he was preventing Leon from leaving the ghetto. Leon was put in the Judenrat's jail, a cellar. At Fredka Oxenhendler and Juzek's wedding, Merin asked Fredka what she wanted as a gift, and she replied, that "Leon should come to the wedding." After that, Leon was freed.

He talks about Mordechai Anielewicz's visit to Sosnowiec. He stayed mainly on a farm, but one evening went to Kozuch's house when Leon was there too. Leon criticized Anielewicz for going first to Merin instead of first approaching the Sosnowiec community for money to buy weapons. Although Merin apparently didn't give him money (probably Merin was afraid), Leon praises Anielewicz as a hero.

Leon also talks about shady financial dealings in the ghetto, unrelated to Anielewicz. He says that they met Geller several times in the ghetto, and he was a very good young man. They knew Geller better than Anielewicz, who represented the "Hechalutz (Chalutz)" movement. Leon did not attend the second meeting with Anielewicz because Leon says that he's been an "opposer" all his life. He mentions that given the impossibility of revolting, he would leave the ghetto three times a day.

Leon talks about the impracticality of mounting any revolt in the Sosnowiec Ghetto because of the layout of the ghetto. Instead of blocks of tall buildings next to each other, as in Warsaw, Sosnowiec had small houses separated from each other by 50 to 100 meters. They also had no outside support, because the surrounding Poles were very unfriendly to Jews. Poles would receive one-half or one kilo of sugar for turning in a Jew to the Gestapo. There were exceptions, though, including one Polish woman who saved 80 people's lives.

Tape 2

After the roundup in the soccer field and the deportation of many Jews, Leon and his friends began to think about self-defense. It was very clear in their minds -- they will never go to Auschwitz.

They were going to get weapons in the “Protectorate” in Czestochowa, where there were some friends of the HaNoar HaTzioni. Leon was chosen to go. They also weighed the possibility of joining the Partisans in Miechow, but it was not possible. Travelling with fake *laissez-passeurs*, they went to Czestochowa to try to get weapons. There were no weapons to be had there, but on the way back to Sosnowiec, Leon visited a Polish man who was a go-between with the Jews. Leon bemoaned the fact that he could not obtain weapons, but the Pole managed to find some from friends -- at a handsome profit. Leon made a triumphant return to Sosnowiec with the weapons. He dressed in a special get-up of a hunter, even with a feather on his hat. The first decision made after obtaining the weapons was “not to walk like sheep to slaughter to Auschwitz.”

Entry (?) to the Sosnowiec Ghetto occurred only in 1943; together with the Jews of Bedzin. Leon talks again about an uprising there was not possible because of the ghetto’s physical layout. There were single, small houses, separated from each other, unlike the Warsaw Ghetto. He talks of the importance of having some ghetto dwellers escape and hide, so that after the war ended, they could tell the story.

Leon departs again to obtain weapons, but found none. He had learned about different weapons from courses in high school. All the youth movements worked together in the instructional farm (Hachshara) in Bedzin. Leon did not work there for ideological reasons.

A connection was found through which to send Jews to Vienna, and from there to cross to Switzerland. About 50 people made it, in small groups. Passports on official paper were obtained for them from different countries, including South and Central America. Once in Vienna, the Jews could find work because able-bodied citizens had been sent to the front by 1943.

Trying to obtain weapons from a German owner of a workshop where Jews worked ended badly.

Leon rarely slept at home because he feared that the Jewish police would detain him. He mentions the head of the Jewish police, who tried to obtain a Paraguayan passport for himself, or be in charge of distributing passports for money. Leon also received a passport, but decided not to use it because the youngsters in his group, 14 to 18 years old, would be without a guide. The group in which Leon was supposed to leave was caught and sent to their deaths in Auschwitz. A decision was made that fighting back would not work, so fleeing was the best option. Preparations to leave included obtaining money to pay people willing to hide Jews and clothes, usually stolen from the workshops.

On August 1, 1943, the Germans surrounded the Sosnowiec Ghetto. Leon tried to help people flee. Leon and his group tried to flee from the ghetto through shots and grenades, but they did not succeed. On August 3, the ghetto was declared free of Jews. The ones who survived from Leon’s group volunteered to stay behind to clean the ghetto. Leon flees the ghetto, and finds a hiding place. He tells of his attempt to go to Hungary.

Tape 3

On October 3, 1943, Leon went to the movies in Katowice when he was left alone. A few days before, when they accompanied people to the train to work in Vienna as non-Jews, two of his friends were taken, Bolek and Chaim (Haim). They were on that train, but the group got only to Slovakia, and then to Budapest.

He tells of being detained by the German police, due to an informant, but eventually he is released. He finds the informant two years later, and tells of the informant's trial and punishment. He describes how his friends Bolek and Chaim were taken. He talks of travelling to Vienna with a friendly "Volksdeutsch" (Volksdeutsche) to deliver winter clothes to the Jews there. He was caught there, and was accused of being a spy. Leon tells of escaping from jail, and making an eventful train trip to Katowice, and walking from there to Sosnowiec.

At the end of 1943, Leon receives official documents, with which he is able to travel to any place within the Protectorate for six months. He tells of the loss of the papers through a police trick.

He tells of Mrs. Bojedaie's (?), motivation to help many Jews (around 80?) by hiding them in her home. Leon was forced to abandon his refuge there, and lost his papers. He wandered around in fear of being caught. Mr. and Mrs. Bojedaie had fled. Leon breaks down. In the street, he meets a woman named Dombrowski, and hardly remembers her. She takes him home, where he stays for two weeks. Leon finds Bojedaie, who helps him find a smuggler to take him over to Slovakia, to Zilina (Sillein, Zsolna). There, he meets Steiner (Shteiner) and Kraznanski (Krasnansky).

Leon tells of being moved to Prešov (Eperies, Eperjes, Eperyos, Preshov, Preszow). He crossed the border with the aid of a Jew named Swarz (sp?). He arrived in Budapest on November 13, 1943. Leon joined a group, including his parents, who lived together in a pensione.

Leon decides to become active in bringing the rest of the Jews to Budapest. He travels to the border, to Sopron (Odenburg), between Germany (now it's in Austria) and Hungary. He makes contact with the rebbe there, and finds a smuggler to begin bringing the Polish Jews stranded in Vienna. Leon succeeds, and is appointed to the rescue committee in Budapest.

He tells the fate of his sister, who also survived.

Leon tries to convince the Jews in Hungary that they have to be ready to flee, although the Jews trusted Horthy's government. He suggested fleeing to Romania, where Antonescu did not let the Nazis touch the Jews (in exchange for a lot of money). The last group of Polish refugees is caught in Sopron and sent to a prison in Budapest, in Rumbach (Rombach) [Note: the Rumbach Street Synagogue]. Later, this became a ghetto from which Jews were taken to Auschwitz. Leon tells of making contact with them, and deciding to free them. They succeed in doing this in March 1944, on the same day the Germans entered the city. He looks for ways to cross the border to Romania.

Just before the Germans entered Budapest, it was decided to move the Polish Jewish contingent to a village far from the city. The entire group moved to Mohács. But in such a small village, everyone knew who the Poles were, and maybe also that they were Jewish. The Germans entered Budapest, and one of the group arranged their transfer to Romania. Leon talks about the politics of the Zionist groups there. A few certificates to Israel arrived also.

They found another way to send people out. Some Poles wanted to join Anders' Army in Russia via Turkey. It became the safest way, "the Polish way", and about 30 people left that way. The assistant mayor of Szeged (Szegedin, Szoreg, Algyo, Gyála, Gyálarét, Tápé) did not know that the Poles, whom he loved, were also Jews, so all the groups succeeded.

While fleeing from Mohács to Budapest, both of Leon's parents were caught. They succeeded in getting the father out of prison. This was June 1944, and the entire group had left Mohács. Hungarian Jews did not want to flee to Romania.

When the Germans entered Budapest, they requested a representative of the Jewish community to be their liaison. Leon, having experienced the Judenrats in Poland, refused. Because there was no way out, one Jew, Kastner (Kasztner?), was appointed.

Tape 4

The fear of appointing a Jewish representative to the Gestapo was that he would be slowly convinced of all the lies the Nazis told him. Just two weeks after Kastner's appointment, 150 Jews were requested to widen an old road in exchange for papers guaranteeing their safety. After a heated discussion, the group refused to send the 150 people, and nothing happened to them. Kastner had not been aware that he was falling victim to the Nazi lies, Leon says.

Leon talks about sending refugees to Romania.

In fear of collaborators, Leon joins a group going "the Polish way", but his group is detained within view of the smuggler who was going to help them cross the border. They are returned to Szeged, and Leon, together with three other non-Jewish Poles in the group, was sent to the Hungary-Yugoslavia border; to a training-work camp. Leon had undergone a successful operation to reverse his circumcision, and that's why he was not detained like the other two Jews in the group. Then, Leon is caught and taken to the Gestapo, despite the changes he made in his identity and his physical appearance.

The "crème de la crème" of Hungarian Jewry, including a senator, a finance minister, etc. were in prison. Leon told them to use any influence they still may have with Horthy's government, still in power in mid-June, 1944, in order to save their skin. But they didn't believe him.

Leon is interrogated about his real identity. He doesn't cave in, despite horrendous physical abuse. Witnesses (Polish-Jewish collaborators) are brought in to testify as to Leon's identity, and they confirm his real one. After three days of interrogations, without beatings, Leon confirms that he helped many people cross to Romania. He gives names and physically accurate descriptions -- they had all changed their names and were far from harm's way. He is returned to the cell where the doctor, head of the hospital, had taken care of his wounds. On that day, Horthy was deposed, and the entire distinguished prison population was sent to their deaths. Leon's group knew that he had been taken, and where he was. They attempted to rescue him, but failed.

Leon is sent by train to Vienna, where he meets his mother. His father, whom Leon had managed to free from jail, went to Palestine in 1944. Leon tries to escape from the train, but is caught. From Vienna, Leon went to Katowice, while the rest went to Auschwitz. For 1½ months, he was in the Gestapo prison in Katowice, under a Nazi officer who was friendly to him, and protected him. Leon gives the officer the box of Ovomaltine in which his mother had hidden gold coins.

Leon is taken to Auschwitz I by himself. He tells of the processing into the camp. There were still "selections" in the camp, conducted by Mengele. Leon hid successfully.

Leon tells of the first day in Auschwitz, in the barracks of the “non-workers.” On the second day, he worked in the delivery of food for the block. He feared losing weight. He tells of meeting Isik (Isak?), 16 years old, a “people” for one of the Germans, on whom they had done medical experiments, even castration. Leon had enough to eat. There was a black market in Auschwitz for food, dollars, and more -- goods taken from the arriving transport passengers. Isik asks Leon to take him along whenever Leon can escape.

He tells of the different commandos doing work outside of the camp. Leon worked for the SS laundry room outside of the camp. The job was obtained for him by Isik. A young woman who had been in the Zionist movement with Leon was also working there. He tells of stealing laundry to exchange for food. Money was used many times to buy the freedom of someone slated for extermination, such as the Rabbi from Zawiercie (Zavertse, Zavirtche, Zavyerche) in Silesia. It took three payments to obtain his release. But he didn't survive the war. Leon also tells of Russian prisoners arriving in the camp.

One Sunday, Leon called a meeting of the Zionist comrades, and discussed how they would be able to flee. The encouragement worked. He tells how the shirts and other laundry items were sold. Leon sends food to his mother, who is alive in Buchenwald. The aid is sent through the women who worked in the laundry room. Leon begins to think about fleeing with the aid of a Pole.

The preparations to flee were interrupted by the approach of the Russians, January 16 or 17, 1945. The entire camp is evacuated by the Germans, and the march goes west. Then the evacuees are ordered to return. At that point, Leon and the two others (Isik and his friend) decide to escape. Before leaving the camp, they had taken blankets and ample provisions, as no one had been guarding the food storage. Leon tells of the escape from the death march, heading toward Katowice, and seeing fleeing Germans on the way. He continues with the arrival in Katowice, and departing (on foot) to Sosnowiec, arriving in Sosnowiec, and finding refuge. Then the Russians arrive, and he gives his impressions.

The Jewish community begins organizing; the ideals of the Zionist movement are still alive. Despite Leon's demurring, he is chosen as the head of the community. He took over the distribution of food and houses for the returning survivors. In March 1945, Leon resumed helping Jews get to Palestine.

Tape 5

Leon tells of the condition of the returning survivors. He mentions that some dealt in the black market. He also tells of the existence of the Russian camps, from which the Jews also got some foodstuffs from March – April 1945. The Russian major in charge called the representative of the surviving Jews, Leon, to meet with him. The major was a Jew from Odessa, and apparently from the well-known Belkin family. When the Russian detachment was forced to move because of the approach of the Russian front, this detachment was always ahead of them, and the major introduced the Jews to the supply officer of the Second Ukrainian Army, who would give them food.

Leon tells of the revelation of the Russian major about his family; the trip to get the foodstuffs for the Polish refugees; and obtaining three American GM trucks full of food for at least three weeks. He relates that on that trip, they went to Gliwice (Glayvits, Gleiwitz), passing Katowice and Bytom (Beuthen, Beuthen-Hochenlinde, Beuthen-Karf). Thanks to the distributed foods, the survivors began recuperating. Many more survivors arrived.

Leon Blatt is visited by a lieutenant, a representative of the Russian army, to turn over a Jewish “collaborator” with the Nazis. Leon refuses, and he is accused by the lieutenant to have been a collaborator himself. Leon orders him out. After a few days, he gets a call from the major in Katowice, and is invited to go there for a chat. All the other people in leadership roles of the Jewish survivors advise Leon to flee. There was the possibility of going south, toward Italy, posing as a Greek refugee returning home, but Leon refuses. He goes to Katowice, where the major apologizes for his lieutenant’s accusations of collaboration; evidence had been found to the contrary. Also, he offers Leon a job as his aide in order to build the “new, democratic Poland”, and assures Leon of a good rank. Leon asks for three days to consider the offer, and then he flees to Hungary. It was May 1945; he left Poland for good.

Leon tells of his arrival in Budapest and later visiting Bucharest, where a meeting of all the youth movements was taking place. Abba Kovner fought to unite all the youth movements into one, but they did not want Betar. That was the “excuse” used not to join the united front. The HaNoar HaTzioni (Leon’s movement) said that if Betar is not allowed, they would vote against it. The unity lasted only a few months because, after arrival in Israel, each movement member went to join his own kibbutz. After the meetings in Bucharest, Leon returned to Budapest.

He tells of helping with the Aliyah “B”, the second illegal immigration that went through Hungary to Italy and Yugoslavia (?). Leon decided not to go to Palestine immediately. Apparently, he liked his status as one of the leaders of the community in Budapest, and perhaps he wanted an easier life after his suffering during the Shoah. He was 25 in 1945, and wanted a life. Also, he had a girlfriend.

Leon tells of being reunited with his mother. When the Russians came, she walked from Auschwitz, close to 500 kilometers, to Bayreuth. When Leon finally met his mother in Bayreuth, she was well established there. His father was in Palestine, after departing from Romania. Leon stayed in Europe, Germany, for three years after the end of the war.

Leon gives his reflections on his life away from Israel, his criticisms of Israel today, and his reaction to the people of the other youth movements who have harsh words about him. He feels that the only thing he did was to pay them for all the offenses that they did to him first. It was his vengeance at having his own people excluded from certificates, the money pool, and more.