

RG-50.120*0044

Fruchter, Rudi

Tape 1 of 3

- 1.02 Born Rudolph Fruchter in March 1922, in a Jewish hospital in Budapest. He had four siblings. Father had a textile store. When he was almost five, they moved to Vishjo?? In the Maramoresh area in Transylvania. Grandfather had urged them to move because he was concerned they may become assimilated. There, he went to the “Cheder” and learned Yiddish. When he was six, he started Rumanian elementary school and at 13, Yeshiva. Altogether, he left school after the 8th grade because of the hardship at home with four other children. It was a difficult transition from the big city (Budapest to Vishjo) where 99% of the ten to fifteen thousand Jews were Orthodox. He started working and trained to be an auto mechanic as well as a barber. He describes his extended family, the origin of their name, and his discovery of being Jewish by being beaten in elementary school.
- 1.22 At the age of 16, he moved to Arad where his sister lived. Describes his becoming a member of Gordonia youth movement (Zionism). He saw no conflict between Zionism and his orthodox upbringing. Describes his Bar Mitzvah celebration. Elaborates on his attitudes regarding following religious customs in Europe and in today’s Israel.
- 1.44 Describes anti-Semitism in Hungary and Romania at the beginning of the war. He moved back to Budapest, worked as a hairdresser and studied singing (in 1943). Wearing of the yellow star, other restrictions (including barring Jews from the opera) and less money. He tried to help his family. Describes his singing (which, together with being a hairdresser, saved his life several times in subsequent years). **He sings for the interviewers.**
- 2.20 Recruited into a Jewish-only unit of the Hungarian army. No arms or uniform. Worked outdoors in the mountains (7th army, troop 4/7) on road construction. The first group, with 280 people, was liquidated by Hungarian - Ukrainians. In December, he was moved to the Carpatian Mountains - one of many forced labor groups. Describes terrible working conditions, bunkers, freezing snow, and beatings, but they worked cooperatively to fulfill necessary work quotas. Talks about an anti-Semitic officer and the military discipline. He was relatively strong, but many perished. He spent 8 days in Ungvar hospital because of suspected typhoid.
- 2.56 Transported to Auschwitz – three days of terrible cattle-train trip to Auschwitz. Describes arrival in April. Placed in “Zigeunerlager,” i.e. Birkenau, for Jews from Hungary, Romania and Czech. Describes interior of barracks, insignia, Blockelders and Capos. Did haircutting, translating (spoke German, Hungarian, Romanian, and Yiddish).

- 3.39 In Auschwitz, started singing – also for Capo – then in hospital where inmates died all around. It was the worst he had ever experienced. After two weeks, he volunteered as a mechanic and joined a group, which was left to work outside.
- 3.50 Group of mechanics and engineers worked in Tuehl (?) France (labor camp), near Strassburg and Majino Line. Worked in cleaning arms and subsequently, was an electric-welder for tanks. Relatively, the “best” camp he had been to. There were somewhat better living conditions and no physical torture, and more decent attitudes by officers who just wanted them to do their work. Evacuated camp as the allies approached.
- 3.58 Were returned to Germany to Kochendorf camp (near Stuttgart) in October 1944. Built labor camps for Russian P.O.W.’s and built scores of new blocks, like Auschwitz. Almost 10,000 people came (Poles from Stuttgart?)

Tape 2 of 3

- 4.03 Continues to describe life in Kochendorf, which also included Polish Jews and real Russians. The S.S. were outside the camp while the Blockelders, Lagerelteste and Capos were in charge inside the camp. Some were especially cruel, even some Jews. There were four doctors, several jewelers (who worked on stolen gold) and some tailors. He worked as a barber for officers from 9 a.m., but started at 5 a.m. cleaning the officers’ quarters. Neither job provided special privileges or information, as they were treated as non-humans. The cleaning job, however, did provide opportunity to find bread and food leftover, which he tried to distribute fairly among his campmates. Hunger, cruel beatings and exhaustion left many dead. Bodies were burned outside.
- 4.17 Transported to Nekasul??? for a brief duration. He needed to translate from Rumanian (inmates) to German. He was also pushed to serve as a Capo and imprisoned when he refused. The simulated beatings did not work.
- 4.23 Returned to Kochendorf as there was heavy bombing in Stuttgart. Resumed work as a barber and cleaner of the German quarters. He was caught and beaten for stealing bread. Sang “Heilige Nacht” for outside Christmas celebration. There was bombing, but not at the camp.
- 4.49 Transported by train to Dachau. Though it was an extermination camp, it was like a sanatorium to the prisoners, as they knew the Americans were near. He was only there one week.
- 4.52 Transported in Bavarian direction. 15,000 people were on the train and then taken off the train and marched on foot. One officer (not S.S.) warned him that they would be finished soon and urged escape. He and a friend, Soltan, escaped into the woods. It was April and there was still snow in Bavaria. Describes crawling in the snow. He saw a thousand like them wandering in the opposite direction.

Tape 3 of 3

- 5.11 (Taped interview is resumed here after a four month interval)
Corrections to previous recordings: (1) regarding group "3/4" which replaced the earlier, exterminated, group; only one person survived; (2) their group consisted of 240 (not 280) people; (3) he did not work on Sundays; (4) regarding the incident in the hospital, when the Jew who died while he gave him bread – it was in the middle of the Yiddish song about that town Slutsh?; (5) the anti-Semitic Rumanian regime in 1938 was called "Kusa Gola" or "Iron Guard"; (6) "Hermanforesh" was the name of the place on the Austrian border when he worked on the mountain when he was recruited; (7) Longvi?
- 5.23 The escape story continues. Describes the thousands of refugees wandering in one direction and the Germans in the opposite direction. There was chaos and confusion, but he and Soltan went in the same direction as the Germans. They followed tracks in the woods. Entered a town with white flags – the Americans were approaching at this time. They got food and some hiding from civilian Germans.
- 5.35 The Americans took them to the former S.S. base near Garmischpatterkirchen. There was a set-up kitchen and they were provided with an abundance of food, especially meat without the understanding that it would dangerously sicken refugees who have not eaten for years. Convinced the camp commander, nevertheless, many died.
- 5.40 Moved to Munich to search for family and friends. Americans had organized groups and committees to help locate relatives and those seeking repatriation. His friend, Soltan, went to Czechoslovakia, but they remained friends. In Munich, there were thousands of refugees (Hunfskaserne?) He found one brother in Frankfurt and describes how he had changed. He heard through his hometown people about his parents and other brothers who were, apparently, expelled and perished. He went to Romania and after a long search, he found his sister in Arad. He returned to Germany (communists in Romania) and met with another sister who had been taken to Sweden. He also found other camp friends.
- 5.54 Describes his activities in Bergen Belsen, winter 1945 (and other areas near Munich, Felofink) meeting with actors and participating in Yiddish theater. He mentions the names of actors and plays. He slowly regained his singing voice and organized (with the permission of the Bergen Belsen self-government committees) a "Kibbutz Hagibor" with 500 recruits from the Gordonia youth movement. The main activities involved assorted sports in which they excelled and for which he obtained various provisions (not a "Hachshara" kibbutz). He met his future wife there.
- 6.14 He spent 1 & ½ years in Paris during which time he participated in the theater. Returned to Bergen Belsen.

- 6.16 He shows assorted photos from periods in Hungary, Bergen Belsen, etc. Describes own health problems, which originated during the war years' hardships. His wife and other surviving relatives died in recent years due to broken health (except those who had escaped to Sweden).
- 6.25 Group moved to Israel via illegal immigration in 1947. Difficult beginning. Married and joined the Israeli army. Little support. When discharged in 1949, he worked in the army as a civilian (munitions expert). In 1954, developed with others, the first school for cantors in the country. Describes many years of economic hardships and argues that these were the lot of most refugee-immigrants and not just those from Middle Eastern origin. Despite all of the difficulties, he is proud to have served the country and to have been a soldier. His children were soldiers as well. His wife tried to protect their children and barely told them about their past. He thinks it is necessary to remember for future legacies.