

RG-50.120 #055 2 Tapes
Gurewitz, Chaim

Tape I

- 1.02 Describes family before war. Older brother went to the US in 1936. Family relatively well off, religious. Lived in Panevezys, Lithuania.
- 1.08 Anti-Semitism growing in Lithuania in late 1930's. Fascist organizations numerous. On other hand, Jews with property also feared communists.
- 1.10 Panic among Jews in 1939 – what would happen?
- 1.12 Red Army entered Lithuania. Many Jews not particularly upset with this development.
- 1.14 But shortages began to appear. Had to give up some of living space.
- 1.15 Describes earlier membership in Jewish youth organizations, Jewish newspapers. Jewish life in Kaunas in 1930's.
- 1.21 Describes his Bar Mitzvah.
- 1.24 Talks about famous Rabbi Kalman [Karman?].
- 1.25 Describes Jewish welfare organizations in Kaunas.
- 1.28 War begins.
- 1.33 Sees retreating Soviet troops in Kaunas. Lithuanians with white arm bands fire at retreating Soviet troops.
- 1.36 Lithuanians take over in Kaunas. Germans had not arrived. Killing of Jews began with Lithuanians. Drunken bands of Lithuanians.
- 1.40 He and his father taken by Lithuanian guards. Later released – probably because father had business dealings before with one of guard leaders.
- 1.45 Decree issued on restrictions on Jews.
- 1.53 Jews confined to ghetto. Gurewitz and father, who had many connections among Lithuanians, able to remain outside for a while.
- 1.54 Executions of Jews begin.
- 1.57 28 Oct. 1941. 9 [??] thousand Jews killed.

- 1.59 Gurewitz in ghetto. Works at night on construction of airfield.
- 2.03 People in ghetto told to gather at square one morning.
- 2.04 'Selection' takes place.
- 2.10 Describes own reactions, general relief that people were being chosen for different work assignments. Few really believed they would be shot.
- 2.12 French, Austria Jews also brought to Kaunas and shot at execution site – 9th Fort. Thought they were being transferred to work areas.
- 2.15 Talks about need to inform people today, especially youth, about what happened.
- 2.20 Some Lithuanians risked lives to save Jews. But they were relatively few.
- 2.26 After period of massive executions, a period of relative calm ensued.
- 2.31 Describes how they lived, what they ate. Food was available to certain extent in ghetto.
- 2.33 After airfield work, worked in a carpentry shop.
- 2.37 Germans began to reduce territory of ghetto.
- 2.38 At end of 1942 ghetto changed into a concentration camp. Guards no longer Lithuanians, now German SS. Lithuanians their assistants.
- 2.40 Beginning in 1943 massive 'actions' resumed. Old people and children killed.
- 2.41 Describes a round-up of old people and children, which he witnessed.
- 2.44 Many Ukrainians helped Germans.
- 2.46 Discusses escape of POWs and Jews from 9th Fort.
- 2.50 In ghetto sense that Soviet troops advancing. Germans seem nervous.
- 2.51 Germans begin to try to hide traces of their crimes. Began to burn bodies in 9th Fort.
- 2.52 Jews try to prepare hiding places. Fear Germans will kill them before retreating.
- 2.54 First hid in basement, but owing to lack of air, go outside.
- 2.55 Germans round Jews up and taken to railroad freight station.

- 2.57 Loaded onto train. Arrive at Shrutov [sp?].
- 2.59 Women taken off train; men remained.
- 3.01 Taken to concentration camp. Later found out it was Landsberg camp, a branch of Dachau.
- 3.02 Describes people in camp. Walking corpses.
- 3.06 Describes food rations.
- 3.09 Describes filth. Could not bathe from July to November. Lice covered them.
- 3.12 Describes underground huts they lived in.
- 3.14 Worked on building airfield. Carried bags of cement.
- 3.19 Father fell sick.
- 3.23 After war he wrote to Dachau library to find out about father's death.
- 3.25 Taken to bathe.
- 3.28 Many Hungarian prisoners died. Perhaps they had been there longer.
- 3.31 Steals 3 potatoes, caught and beaten.
- 3.35 Describes Jewish 'Blockenfuhrer' and some Jews who helped Germans.
- 3.40 In Feb, March camp began to receive aid packages from abroad.
- 3.42 Steals can of condensed milk. Jewish kapo reports to SS, but Gurewitz is released by SS officer.
- 3.47 Later in spring, US planes bomb area.
- 3.48 Prisoners moved to Dachau from Landsberg camp in April 1945.
- 3.50 Herded out on road by SS. Gurewitz has no more strength. Decides to lie down at side of road and play dead.
- 3.53 German civilian tells them to cross nearby river where they can find Americans.
- 3.54 Hide in hay stack.

3.56 Meet Americans – given food.

Tape II

- 4.01 Gurewitz specifies dates of certain events he had talked about earlier: Ghetto closed to entry/exit Aug., 1941. Few days before Jews had to surrender all valuables. Nov 1942 Jewish youth hanged. March 1944. ‘Action’ against children in ghetto.
- 4.09 Describes efforts after he emigrated to Israel to get information on ghetto period from KGB files which had been opened in Lithuania.
- 4.12 Adds some details to experiences in Dachau. Counting of prisoners.
- 4.15 Shows Red Cross documents with data about himself.
- 4.18 Resumes basic narrative.
Arrives in Munich; taken care of by Americans.
- 4.19 Tries to decide where to go next. Wants to return to Lithuania, find out what happened to family.
- 4.22 In Munich some former prisoners wanted to take revenge on Jewish kapos who had also been in Dachau. Gurewitz criticizes Jewish kapos as cruel, selfish.
- 4.26 Describes to return. Believes he and other returnees would be greeted as heroes.
- 4.27 Cross over into Soviet zone. Soon realize it was a mistake.
- 4.28 Started to return home – by foot, train, wagon.
- 4.31 Put in so-called ‘filtration’ camp by Soviets where interrogations carried out.
- 4.35 Arrives in Kaunas. No acquaintances around.
- 4.37 Arrives in Vilnyas. Finds two cousins.
- 4.39 Decides to go to Panevezys with cousins to find out what happened to mother and sister. Arrives in Panevezys . Looks for work. Put into another ‘filtration’ camp by MVD.
- 4.41 After released, had to report monthly. Couldn’t leave town.
- 4.42 Describes search for traces of family.
- 4.48 Describes Panevezys – before war 10,000 Jews – 1/3 of total population.

- 4.49 Describes what Lithuanians and Germans did to Jews – according to what he is told by Lithuanians.
- 4.53 Jews shot in groups.
- 4.56 Germans finally move people out of ghetto. Shot in nearby area – Payostas [phonetic].
- 5.01 Reads statistics on shooting of Jews. Statistics evidently kept by German officers. More than 8,000 in Payost.
- 5.08 Gurewitz to visit Payostas where killing carried out. Gets permission to visit area, which in 1945 after war was closed area.
- 5.10 Starts digging in likely spot and finds hair, lime. Found other areas which were part of massed grave.
- 5.13 Effort begins to open this area and to have some kind of monument erected.
- 5.14 Local officials permitted, but didn't assist.
- 5.15 Discusses Shmuel Pepert, who began a campaign to have Jewish children who had been entrusted to Lithuanians returned to their parents or other relatives. Pepert later killed by Lithuanian nationalists.
- 5.18 Describes monument and dispute over its description of Jews as victims of not only of Nazis but also of Lithuanian nationalists.
- 5.26 Discusses later state of sites connected with Lolocaust and Jewish life. Jewish cemetery in Pnevzhes now a city park. In Vilnyas the Labor Union halls had steps made of Jewish grave stones.
- 5.34 Discusses need to educate youth about realities of the Holocaust – refute those who spread doubts about it.
- 5.44 Discussing end of war, says that many Dachau inmates took revenge on German guards after liberation.
- 5.46 Discusses various groups in Dachau, degree of cooperation among prisoners. Some had 'protection', which prisoners dubbed 'Vitamin P'.
- 5.54 Discusses leadership among prisoners in Dachau and ghettos.
- 5.59 In answer to question from interviewer, Gurewitz tells about prisoners helping one another.

- 6.10 Strangely, Gurewitz was never ill in the camps.
- 6.15 Discusses Jewish kapos.
- 6.18 No prisoners escaped. There was no place to go. Germans all around.
- 6.25 Yiddish was lingua franca [?].
- 6.27 Describes cultural in Kaunas ghetto.
- 6.36 Youth in ghetto believed that war would be over soon and that life would return to normal.
- 6.40 In the camp, there he remembers no political discussions – only talk about whether they could survive. In 1945, American planes flew over camp, packages from Red Cross began to arrive. Feeling of optimism ensued.
- 6.43 During time in camp, he was essentially a ‘walking corpse’. Didn’t know day or month, heard no news, thought only about getting a piece of bread or bowl of soup.
- 6.52 Throughout his life in USSR after the war, the fact that he had been in the Kovno ghetto and later in Dachau was always a black mark against him. Communist bureaucracy mistrusted people who had survived in ----, under Nazi control.

END OF TAPE