

RG-50.120 #056

I S R A E L G U T M A N

1 :00 (start **tape** 1/5) to 1 :27

Family Background

Was born in Warsaw in 1923. Had one older (sickly) sister and one younger sister. Because of economic hardships the family lived mostly in poor Polish peripheral neighborhoods. The children felt **anti-Semitism** and tensions with other children early in life. Parents maintained Jewish traditions, though they were less religious than grandparents. Family gatherings - and appearance - were important and they tried to hide their economic failures as they lived for the children. Describes his school **experiences**, first in a "**Cheder**" and then Jewish-public and Polish elementary and secondary schools - where **anti-Semitic** encounters were daily events. Dropped out to help family by working.

1:28 to 1:56

Youth Movement Experiences

Describes how he joined the "**Hashomer Hatzair**" youth movement, its membership and structure, its educational, social and ideological activities, its meetings, camps, counselors etc. He presents a detailed and thoughtful analysis of the positive influences the movement had on its members as well as some of its shortcomings. He met **Mordechai Anilevitz** there.

1:57 to 2:14

Outbreak of War

Describes the bombardments and the damage, the youth movements' dispersement, the shock, the shortages - yet more mutual aid. Father died and older sister a year later.

2:17 to 2:34

Reorganization of Movement and Underground

Early '40 the counselors returned from the East -- were they had been sent. Discusses **Tossia Altman**, Joseph Kaplan, **Mordechai Anilevitz**, Shmuel **Bressler**, **Warshawi** brothers;, their role in reorganizing the youth movement, political disagreements, establishing underground activities; their move to a different location, how they integrated their Movement meetings with their forced labor duties.

2:28 Mother died of typhoid in the ghetto. Younger sister was taken to **Janush Korchak's** orphanage with **Gepner's** help -- an influential resident. Describes his activities in publishing and distributing an underground bulletin; life in an "urban Kibbutz" (commune) with other members', continued intense activities into **mid-'41** . Describes a meeting of 500 members and its importance.

2:34 to 2:58

Life in the ghetto Youth Movement "Commune"

Describes the shared living arrangements with other members, their importance not only in terms of physical support but in keeping their spirits and 'humanity', training of young disciples, loyalties. lack of contact with the outside world.

2:59 to 3:02

Korchak's Orphanage

Describes visits to his sister, the orphanage, **Korchak's** personality and devotion.

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3:04 to 3:38

The Ghetto as Isolated Entity

Describes their relationships with Poles, attitude towards Germans. Minimal contacts. The Youth Movement members avoided being detected and taken into forced labor. They considered Jewish ghetto police as traitors and the **Judenrat** as abhorrent. They tried to escape the ghetto reality, isolating themselves also from those elements who tried to "live up"

the situation. Describes the difficulties, conflicts and tensions of the different subgroups within the closed ghetto society.

3:39 to 3:47 More about **Korchak**

3:48 to 3:57

Forced Labor Camp

Discusses the 'policy' of volunteering Or not for forced labor, especially among youth movements' members.

3:57-4:04 [end tape 1/5]

Activities as Youth Movement Counselors

[start tape 2/5]

4.05-4.20

Underground Journalism

Describes how they published paper ["EL-AI"], who was involved, how they printed and distributed it, sources of news.

4:21 to 4:45

Political Affiliations and more about Training Members

Describes ideological conflicts between those leaning more to Soviet/communism and those for whom Zionism was most important. what was their reality? Issues of how to train youth, new groups and seminar **meetings**. **Names of** counselors and guides.

4:44 to 5:08

Turning point, **Reorganization**, **April 18 Events**.

Towards (end **of?**) 1942 with news from **Chelmno** staged sensing danger. Organizing into five-person units ("anti-fascist blocks") as if to join partisans, old movement organization collapsed. still mostly anti-Nazi. April 18th events. Political underground. Mock trials and murder of collaborators (from among **Judenrat** and Jewish **police?**; names.

5:09 to 5:53

Deportations and Life in **Milla Street Commune**

How he and others avoided deportation. Friends who perished. Life in Mille street commune. Constant threat. Discusses leaders (**Anilevitz** et al) changes in behavior , becoming fighters. Dissolution of all organization

5:54 to 6:30

After Deportations. New Resistance

Change in ghetto mood and population after the end of deportation (Sept. **15-20**). **Developing** fury: how was it allowed to happen. Leading to organize new resistance : Jewish Fighting Organization ("**Irgun Yehudi Lochem**"). **Describes** period of great despair, no planning Organization of the new resistance which helps counter the resigned mood. Notions of revenge emerge, hatred of Jewish police and **Judenrat**. The psychological importance of the resistance organization.

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6:30 to 7:05 [end tape 2/5]

More about the 'Jewish Fighting Organization'; **Mordechai Anilevitz**

Describes the family-like feeling of living together', compares the control over Own schedule etc. even in the locked-up ghetto existence, unlike in the concentration camp. The importance of telling **Anilevitz** - who was absent - and his leadership, Execution of **Jaacov Lakin** of the Jewish **Police and** its effect on the ghetto. The structure of the ghetto and German policy. **The** Jewish Fighting Organization and which political parties were included, relationship with the Polish underground. Their daily life, didn't work outside.

7.06 to 7.37

" January 18 Deportation and Armed Resistance

Describes the new deportation for which they were not prepared. Arms distributed by Anilevitz (not to him). The importance of this event: start of Warsaw revolt. Describes its all-ghetto participation and effects.

7:35 to 7:45

Preparation of Underground Bunkers

Describes how the entire Ghetto prepared bunkers', search for places, equipping them with supplies and munitions; personnel. He was sent to help prepare one which was to house wounded later. Network and organization.

7:45 to 7:53

The Jewish Fighting Organization

This Organization did not prepare bunkers as they did not believe in rescue -- only revolt (assuming the end?). Elaborates on their attitude and its contradictions.

7:54 to 8:05

More about the Bunker:

Describes the 3 bunkers in 30 Faskaishka g?1 street. , their population. Behavior of Germans and Poles.. Wilner.

8:07 to 8:38

The Revolt and Being Wounded

Revolt started Passover evening when new deportations were to begin. Describes the preparation. As responsible for bunker security, he could move at night when no Germans came. But then he encountered searching Germans , shot at them - and was wounded in the eye by their hand grenade. He and Wilner were talking for three nights as they were laying in the wounded's bunker. He continues to describe the events of May 1 to 4; the burning houses, escapes through the rooftops;, German's searching hideouts with dogs and gassing bunker openings. Caught.

8:40 to 9:04

Majdaneck

Cattle-car transport to camp. Describes arrival, physical setting, Abuse, beating up, collective punishments, sick and apathetic. Describes it as the worse of all war-time experiences. So weak he feared he would be taken out of work-selecion. .Succeeded to escape and hide in car for those leaving for work, which transported them to Auschwitz.

9:05 to 10:10(end of 3/5)

Auschwitz #1 and "Union" Work

Describes Auschwitz #1 . Selection, sent to Buna (?) One month in quarantine. Couldn't handle brick work - hospitalized, then sent to block #9 ("sick barrack"), isolated but received care from Polish registrar. Improved and moved to Block #4. Describes help received from several people. Chose to work at "Union" and describes its advantages over other places and the ghetto. Jewish workers group (initially few Jews and mostly Poles and others; daily schedule', mutual aid; activity in underground groups; solidarity and stability . Discusses money, privileges, "opportunities" , levels of adjustment in camp. What they knew about other camps and news of the outside. Names friends. Was there from fall '43 to January 18 '45.

10:12 (start of tape 4/5) to 10:35

More about Underground Affiliation in the Camp

Describes the history and nature Of underground organizations in the camp. Mostly non-Jewish Poles and other political prisoners, who had better job conditions and more privileges. Jews at bottom.

10:36 to 10:52

The "Explosives" Story

Refers to the smuggling of gun powder from Union workers, mostly through the women prisoners of which he knew only small segments, apparently used later in **Sonderkommando** revolt. Tells about Raja (**Uja**) **Robota** and her fate

10:53 to 11:09

Evacuation from Auschwitz

Describes stirring in camp as Soviets approach. Conflicting plans for rescue, revenge, escape, underground etc. Importance of sticking together with friends. Evacuation started January 18 '45

Last transport. Guarded by Older Germans. Open cars and march in the cold. Czech villagers gave food - in Vienna barely got water.

I 1 :1 0 to 1 1 :50

Mauthausen

Describes arrival, quarantine, daily life, trying to connect Sundays with friends.,

1 1 :18 to 1 1 230 Reflects on the different value assigned to death Vs. survival, [sense of guilt or. betrayal] to partisans vs. camp prisoners -- believes all myth and choices accidental. The friendships and loyalty of those from common background or shared experiences matters most to those like him who had no one left. This was their new family.

Sent to assorted camps around **Mauthausen**, including **Wienerneustadt** to airplane factory where no more work. Prisoners like skeletons -. Starvation to thy point of Cannibalism. Sent to mud barracks in **Gunsterkirche**. So weak (45 **Kg.**) he was placed on ceiling beam for support.

11.59 to 12.04

Liberation [*start 5/5*]

On May 5, 1945. Initially too weak to understand, bat. Eventually walked to **Wells?** Slowly rested. Hospitalized in **Linz**. Again (as from time to time), was helped by others, some non-Jews, but left soon because he heard Jewish Brigade was in Italy.

12:04 to 12:50

Italy, Work with Refugees

Was smuggled to **Modena** Italy, met refugees, Brigade activists, friends of common background, was transferred to **Bari** in the south, traveled to Rome, eventually joining the leadership of the Ha-**Shomer** Ha-**tzair** movement , becoming involved in organizing groups and communes (Kibbutz) of those refugees who planned to emigrate to Palestine. Describes his traveling to adjacent countries in this role, and refers to this period as a good and exciting one. Did not wish to visit Poland. Reflects on the fate of Jews, the prevailing attitude toward the 'survivor remnants', and related what happened to some he knew.

12:50 to 13:22 (end tape 5/5)

Immigration to Palestine

As the situation in Palestine became tense, he insisted on being sent there but visited Warsaw briefly before. Describes his first encounters in Palestine. Being alone, he joined a Kibbutz where he knew no one and lived there for 25 years. For many years he did not want to dwell on the past. Eventually he renewed contacts and tells what happened to others. He also relates his opinions about being Jewish, the meaning of heroism and fighting during the holocaust, the importance of **comradeship** which resulted from it , and commitment to those who perished.

Translated/transcribed by **Hava Bonne** January , 1999

Note: This man wrote numerous articles and books about the Holocaust.

