

RG-50.120 #070 3 Tapes
KALISHER, RACHEL

- I
- 1.00 Rachel Kalisher [nee Kaplansky] was born in Poland, in the little town of Sokoly in the province of Bialystok. Her father made up his mind - even before they were born - that his children would only speak Hebrew at home. Therefore, Rachel spoke mainly Hebrew with her parents and brother. Even her Polish housekeeper spoke some Hebrew. Rachel knew very few words in Polish. When she grew up she wanted to learn the language of the street, the language of the children: Yiddish.
 - 2.14 Rachel went to a public Polish school, the only one in the shtetl. This was the first contact with non-Jews and with antisemitism.
 - 4.13 Rachel and her brother, who was just apart, decided they will leave Poland. Rachel wrote a letter to her aunt in Palestine. Rachel was 12-13, and about to finish school. She asked her aunt to send an 'invitation' for her to go to Israel. She got an answer praising her wishes and her letter... but not the invitation requested.
 - 5.00 Rachel and her brother continued their studies in the Bialystok Hebrew gymnasium. Everything was in Hebrew, everyone was Jewish. She loved the school. The year was 1936-37. They wanted to continue their studies upon graduation, at the Hebrew University.
 - 5.57 A year before graduation, in 1939, war broke out. Rachel's shtetl ended up on the Russian side.
 - 6.31 Rachel's father had been a school principal in Czestochowa, where he met and married Rachel's mother. She was a pretty, intelligent girl, who was studying Hebrew privately. She inherited a store from her parents, and Rachel's father managed it. Later on, the children helped in the store during school vacations.
 - 10.40 Encounter with Germans.
 - 14.05 Entrance of Russians to the shtetl.
 - 17.00 Th family decides to go to Vilna, and not to be caught behind the Iron Curtain. After the father and son succeed in getting there, the border was shut: Rachel was stuck in Bialystok, continuing her studies, and her mother in the shtetl.
 - 19.39 Mother and daughter are given ID cards as Russian citizens. On Rachel's card she is entered as 'student'; her mother as 'rich businesswoman' for whom leaving the shtetl was forbidden.
 - 21.00 Rachel's mother moved. Changes in the school.

- 22.39 Period of freedom for the Jews to move around the city, go to parks, etc., without being taunted.
- 23.47 In 1941, Rachel graduated. There were no news from her brother and father.
- 24.47 After the Russians took over Lithuania, Rachel and her mother went to join them. Her brother was already a university student. The father, considered a refugee, had been forced to move to a little town: Pilviskiai.
- 25.00 The family reunites. Mother obtains a different ID card in which she is classified as bookkeeper.
- 25.13 War breaks out on June 22, after Germans enter Lithuania. Rachel, her brother and mother were in Vilna.
- 26.51 Lithuanians rejoiced, and welcomed the Germans.
- 28.01 Jewish refugees from the German occupied areas [Warsaw, Lodz] were arriving in Vilna and telling stories of antisemitism.
- 29.00 Mother decided to bring father home. She obtained permission to travel to Pilviskiai, to bring him. She was not allowed to board the train, as it was discovered she was a Jew. They decided to hire a coach to go, but had to change their minds when they found out that inhabitants of Vilna, who were caught fleeing, were put to death.
- 30.56 The anti-Jewish laws were enacted in Vilna.
- 32.00 Rachel is taking to work, to clean the house of an SS officer.
- 37.00 Rachel is confined to a cell because she wears her brother's pants to work. Ways she guarded her sanity [reciting Bible excerpts she had learned by heart, and poems by Bialek and Tchernichovsky]. The same night she was returned home, with a warning: never to wear pants again!
- 47.35 One day, the order comes 'to pack'. It was autumn 1941. They were marched to a Jewish neighborhood where inhabitants had been evacuated previously. Soon enough, the ghetto dwellers were able to go to work. That was their chance to trade for food and clothing with the Polish neighbors.
- 56.42 The Vilna ghetto. Yom Kippur 1941. The request comes for 5,000 young people to work. Rachel's mother prompts them to hide. They are spared.
- 2.01.00 After a few days, the first news came about a place called Ponary, and the fate of those 5,000 people who had been taken from the ghetto. A girl who managed to escape from the killing pit told them the horror story. The Germans did not cover the pit hermetically; they just scattered some lime over it. The young woman had been

shot in the hand. She fainted and fell over the other bodies. When she woke up, alive, she managed to get out and to the ghetto. She went directly to the hospital and the doctors did not believe her story, and neither the fact that young people - who could be useful - would be shot. The Jews did not want to look at the truth in the face. But the youth in the ghetto believed her.

- 3.05 The youth hid again for the second 'action'. Rachel's brother, at that time, documented every single happening in the ghetto in his notebook.
- 4.59 The third 'action'. Those who had the yellow working permit could stay alive and include, in the permit their family. Rachel had a cousin who possessed such a permit. She included in it the entire family of Rachel's. Family was supposed to move from the 'big' ghetto to the 'small' one. They did.
- 9.01 It was obvious to the family that they needed to flee. They heard rumors that in the Bialystok ghetto the situation was better, as was in the city of Lodz. They started getting organized to flee.
- 12.00 The escape to the Bialystok ghetto.
- 15.41 The rosy situation in Bialystok. It is Rachel's family that bring the news about Ponary to the ghetto.
- 16.00 Informers in the ghetto.
- 16.47 Life in the Bialystok ghetto. Cultural life.
- 21.44 Lecture by the head of the Judenrat about conditions in the ghetto. He removed all hope of survival. Rachel's family decided to flee again.
- 22.18 Rachel worked in the agricultural parcels. She walks out, to the shtetl of Sokoli, to organize the family's escape -and find a hiding place in the forest.
- 33.00 Germans surround Sokoly.
- 40.00 Rachel hides in a Christian woman's home.
- 48.28 The return to Bialystok. But the ghetto was closed; Rachel is forced to return to the Christian woman's farm. Finally, she manages to get back into the ghetto, after having spent weeks outside.
- 3.02.04 In the meantime, all the other villages had been liquidated; only Bialystok was still spared, and refugees of the other places were arriving there.
- 6.54 Germans search for fleeing Jews with the help of the Poles. When found, the Jew was shot on the spot and the Pole buried him. Other Poles, though, gave the fleeing

Jew a hiding place. When this was found, the Germans would kill both, Poles and Jews, and bury them in the same grave.

- 11.07 Arrival of uncle and aunt in Bialystok. Their story.
- 27.00 Beginning of underground organization in the ghetto.
- 29.00 Informers among the ghetto Jews.
- 32.02 Arguments for and against uprising in the ghetto versus fighting in the forests. It was decided to rebel in the ghetto so as not to go like sheep to the slaughter.
- 34.59 February 1943 finds Rachel outside of the ghetto, and the ghetto is shut close. After a couple of days, she sees that Jews are being taken out of the ghetto, to the train. Rachel is safe in her hiding place. This had been the first 'action' in the ghetto, which lasted several days.
- 47.45 Rachel manages to get into the ghetto again and is informed that many of her friends had been deported. There hadn't been time to organize the resistance before the first 'action'.
- 50.00 The hanging of Malmel and the reasons for it.
- 59.29 July 1943. Mussolini falls and some optimism prevails.
- 4.02.05 Underground education in the ghetto.
- 3.05 August 16, 1943. The Jews wake up: the ghetto is surrounded.

II

- 5.00 Jews are told to come out, as the entire ghetto is being transferred to Lublin. The organized Jews encouraged the other Jews to hide. The Jews were resigned to their fate. Rachel's brother and others were cleaning their weapons which they had taken out from their hiding places. Rachel's mother encouraged her to flee, but the entire place was surrounded hermetically.
- 9.24 A cousin offered Rachel and her mother and brother a hiding place in their bunker. The bunker.
- 17.26 After a couple of weeks, they were spotted and forced to come out of hiding.
- 20.00 Conversation with a German officer, prior to being taken to the point of concentration where other Jews were already taken.
- 24.21 Attempt of the family to flee. They found a place on the other side of the fence, within the ghetto; they had food and drink and books to read.

- 40.37 Search for a way out of the ghetto. Encounter with Poles who showed them the way out.
- 51.21 A new hiding place in a village far from Bialystok, near a young forest. The place was near a friendly Pole, who had befriended in the past, a cousin of Rachel and wanted to marry her. His name was Waczek.
- 5.00.00 Activities while in hiding in the cave. Hunger, thirst. The plagues - change of seasons in the forest.
- 25.00 The brother disappears while on a mission to find bread for the family in the house of Polish friends - who informed on him.
- 29.24 The Front approaches while the remaining group of 3 [Rachel, her mother and Waczek] find a new hiding place in the open, in a wheat field. Waczek is also taken by Germans.
- 37.34 The Russians come. They advised Rachel and her mother to flee from that area, where fighting is still going on. The Russians offer to take them by truck to Bialystok.
- 42.40 The search for housing. Jews were not welcome.
- 45.23 Only 30 Jews were left in Bialystok.
- 47.33 The first women survivors from the Stuthoff camp began arriving in town. A Jewish committee which, in the meantime had been established, helped them.
- 49.00 Encounter with Itzchak [Antek] Zuckerman, and beginning of organization to flee to Israel [the 'Brechah' movement].
- 50.23 Rachel's activities for the 'Brechah'. It was January, but the war was still raging in other parts. Rachel and her mother had already been liberated for 6 months. Waczek returns. The story of his release. Waczek declared himself a Jew to get German soldiers who took him [thinking he was a Russian spy or a partisan]. The Germans asked: 'So, why were you hiding from us?' Waczek: 'Because I want to live.' Germans: 'So, do we kill Jews'? Waczek: 'Of course'. It turned out that these Germans, who knew that Jews were being taken to camps, didn't know that they were also murdered! The Germans gave Waczek a uniform, and took care of him, until he decided to separate from the Germans.
- 55.46 Waczek contracts TB and is sent to a sanitarium. Auschwitz survivors begin arriving, among them former classmates of Rachel's. One of them, Tushke, severely affected by TB died a few days later. She was the only survivor in her family, and wanted to bequeath Rachel her citrus fields in Israel. Rachel did not want to hear about death.

- 59.22 Beginning of organization of the Aliyah 'B; [the second wave of immigration to Israel, who was coined the 'illegal immigration].
- 6.02.00 Rachel travels to Sokoli, her home town. There, she finds out how her brother, Abraham, was killed. She manages to have the people responsible for his death detained. Rachel testifies at their trial. They are sent to Siberia.
- 20.00 A pogrom in Sokoly by Polish hands.
- 32.00 Bialystok is shocked, and in fear of the Polish antisemitism. This was during the spring of 1945.
- 37.05 Rachel is sent by her youth movement, Dror, to establish a training farm in Waldenburg, in upper Silesia.
- 37.30 The members of the training farm. Jewish Soviet refugees, children who had been abandoned and grew up to be law-breakers.
- 42.00 Information on Rachel's father's murder, in Lithuania.
- 45.00 Educational activities in the training farm. Courses outside, in Warsaw, for the best workers.
- 7.00.02 The story of visiting Jewish Russian soldiers after liberation, when Rachel was still active in the 'Bricha' movement.
- 3.17 The immigration to Israel from the graining farms.
- 5.07 Rachel's mother could have obtained an official certificate [1945-46] in the framework of the unified youth movement, but she refused; she wanted to go together with Rachel.
- III
- 7.11.12 Rachel's turn comes to immigrate with her mother. The road traveled in Europe, DP camp in Bavaria.
- 17.30 The long time they waited for their immigration.
- 19.00 Rachel is sent as a counselor to a children's camp. The camp looked like a ghetto, and the children either played Jewish policeman vs. German policeman, or pretended to be hungry ['Mommy, give me something to eat'.] R was sent to the 'Dror World Seminar' in the village of Ludersdorf, 14 km from Dachau. They lived in an abandoned cloister. Many delegates from Israel came there, and the atmosphere was one of support and devotion to Eretz Israel. The children - most of them orphans - were schooled there. Children were in a separate building. The director of the Dror World Seminar was Itzchak Tabenkin. The courses were given in Yiddish, language

that many of the participants [or the teachers from Israel!] hadn't mastered.

- 27.30 Biniamin Harshavsky was one of the students who arrived to the seminar from the USSR, as a repatriate. He had finished a Russian high school and been given a gold medal. He didn't know Hebrew. He was very intelligent but lazy. He was always late to the lectures, which began very early in the morning. He would say: 'I have a physiological need of much sleep'. He goes by a different name today: Professor Benjamin Harshav. Rachel taught him some Hebrew, Bialik's works and more. He was originally from Poland.
- 29.00 At the completion of the seminar, each participant was sent to work in the youth movement of his respective country. Rachel stayed in Germany, in the children's section in Ludersdorf.
- 33.00 Preparations to immigrate to Israel.
- 39.05 Rachel, her mother, and a group of young people travel to Marseilles, on the way to Israel. The War of Independence had already begun. They were there for 3 weeks.
- 40.00 They were taken, under cover at night, to the port and loaded [like cargo] onto the Pan York ship. Crowded conditions: thirst. Children were put up on the deck. Rachel stayed with them, as did her mother.
- 42.59 Arrival in Israel. Rachel's mother went to her sister in Haifa. Rachel went to Pardes Chana, to an immigrant's shelter, together with the children. It was July-August 1948. Kibbutz representatives began arriving to adopt the orphans.
- 43.00 Rachel entered Lochamei Hagetaot Kibbutz, but worked in Yagur. It was very crowded and they looked for other places to establish themselves.
- 8.00.00 New place is found. Rachel was sent to teach school first in Haifa, then in Acco. The development of the kibbutz.