

RG-50.120 #077

Synopsis of the Oral History given by **Yehoyaklm Kochavi**, of himself
Translated from Hebrew into English

1st hour, minutes 1 through 8

Yehoyakim Kochavi was born at the end of 1922 in Berlin, Germany. In Germany, his first name was purposely chosen so that he would fit into society, and his last name is representative of a German village. There were three children in the **Kochavi** family. **Kochavi** recalls playing **Millionaires** a game requiring the use of imagination **with** his siblings, using a shoebox full of pretend money.

Kochavi's parents were from **Poznan**, in East Germany, where there was a complete integration into the German lifestyle. His parents left because they wanted to retain their Jewish identities first; they considered themselves Jews first, then Germans. **Kochavi's** father was a very traditional, pious Jew who followed the Biblical commandments and studied the Torah. **Kochavi's** mother, on the other hand, was more involved in the German lifestyle, for she had grown up in a home which was totally integrated into German society. However, **Kochavi's** mother returned to her Jewish roots, for when she gave birth to her first son, her oldest child, she began to learn Hebrew because she wanted her children to grow up in "that **culture**."

While **Kochavi's** father had been raised to follow a traditional religious lifestyle, when he married and kept his own home, he and his wife did not maintain **kashruth** (the Jewish dietary laws), nor did they keep the Sabbath. However, the idea of the Jewish identity and culture, especially the language aspect of the Jewish culture, was very important to **Yehoyakim Kochavi's** parents. Even though the family was not pious, for the purposes of learning, the **Birkat HaMazon** (Grace said after meals) was said, slowly-slowly, paragraph by paragraph, to ensure that the young **Kochavi** children would learn the language of the prayer, Hebrew. The same learning process was done for the **Hadlakat Nerot** (Candlelighting Ceremony performed in homes and synagogues on Friday evening at sundown.) Also, tunes from Palestine were used during song-times. The idea was to have a **Beit Yehudi Chai**, "a living Jewish home, mixed with German culture.

1st hour, minutes 8 through 12

At the age of nine, **Kochavi** began to participate more avidly in the activities related to German patriotism and Zionism. These activities were held every Sunday-in the playground, or at the train station. There was a lot of singing of German songs, even anti-Semitic ones because the children did not know what they meant. All songs, international ones as well, were sung proudly and loudly by the children. The central basis of the movement was: Israel-to focus on a Jewish homeland. Especially at the time of the High Holy Days, Israel was on the mind of the children. Each child would contribute small amounts of money to the Jewish National Fund collection box he had in his home.

Over the years, **Kochavi's** bond with the State of Israel strengthened. It was natural for each child to believe that he would end up in the Land of Israel. All concerned themselves with this ideal, and nobody could not see how this would not

become a reality because they were never around non-Jewish children. Even in school, **Kochavi** never had a Christian friend. At Christmas time, **Kochavi** would look around town at the decorations, and his parents would invite Christians to their **sukkah** (a booth built by **Jews** during the holiday of **Sukkot** to remember the booths built by the children of Israel in the period where they wandered through the desert for forty years).

1st hour, minutes 12 through 16

In synagogue, **Kochavi's** family was not religious, but pig, a non-kosher food, was never consumed in or away from the home. His father brought the children to the synagogue which would nowadays be considered a Reform synagogue. However, when **Kochavi** went by himself to a synagogue, he chose to go to a Conservative-style synagogue. The family was liberal in its beliefs about Judaism.

Kochavi's belief in Judaism was liberal, but his beliefs in Zionism were conservative and fervent. Often times he would attempt to "convert" his school friends to Zionism.

1st hour, minutes 16 through 21

Kochavi attended a very unique and special school. The school focused on Zionism, Jewish values, and German culture. In 1929, when **Kochavi** went to kindergarten, he learned Hebrew and German from a very devoted teacher who came to receive her Ph.D. in Biology from the University.

Besides studying difficult subjects and disciplines at school, **Kochavi** began to pick up on things by himself. He began to hear about the Communists, the Nazis, and he questioned his future. He would often ask himself "Who will take care of me when my parents die?" However, **Kochavi** knew that his future would be found in the Land of Israel. He figured that Israel was the place to which all Jewish orphans would go.

1st hour, minutes 22 through 24

Kochavi first noticed anti-Semitism when he became ill with appendicitis at the age of 11 or 12. As he went to the hospital and recovered in a ward with other sick children, the children asked who in the room was a Jew. **Kochavi** told them that he was Jewish because he did not realize that to be a Jew was considered bad. After the children teased him, **Kochavi** felt that although he had only intended for there to be a joke, his identity as a Jew was challenged.

1st hour, minutes 24 through 31

The school **Kochavi** attended in later years was called the **Theodor Herzl** School. At this time, Jewish children were still allowed to learn in German schools, but many parents had already removed their children from the German public schools.

When the Jewish children attended the Jewish school, there were some German,

non-Jewish teachers. They were not considered to be a part of the children's world. This was especially true at the age of seventh or eighth grade, when the students already spoke Hebrew and knew about the Jewish culture, and the German teachers were not involved in that culture. The non-Jewish teachers were only involved in the curriculum aspects of the children's lives, sometimes reading and teaching "Hamlet" and other plays.

1st hour, minutes 31 through 42

The date given by Kochavi as the time he established his personal battle with the Nazis is May 1st, year unknown. He recalls that he and his family were forced to remove the German flag on the national holiday, and were expected to have the Swastika flag. Because that flag, the flag of the republic, contained the colors black white, and red, the family needed to figure out a way to raise the flag without getting into trouble. However, in order that the family not get into trouble, the family raised the Prussian flag, a flag containing the colors of black and white. As time rolled on, Kochavi and his Jewish counterparts wanted to change with the times. He remembers having had to salute the German flag-otherwise he would be whipped like an older boy he saw who refused to salute the flag. Kochavi wanted to be like the Nazis-he did not know that they were anti-Semitic at first. He liked the unity the Nazis had, and he liked their uniforms and flags.

Kochavi talks of the time when to be "in with the crowds," he saluted a man and said, "Heil Hitler!" The man got very angry at him. Kochavi claims he will never forget that time, that he, a Jew, said "Heil Hitler!" and got into trouble for it.

1st hour, minutes 42 through 47

Soon after, Kochavi went to Palestine. He went to youth absorption centers, like the one in Tel-chai, one of the most important centers, according to him. Kochavi went to Palestine against his mother's wishes-she thought he was crazy. She worried that after a certain amount of time would pass, her son would not remember the family, or at least recognize its members. Kochavi recalls the sadness every family felt as his and others like his gathered to say farewell to the sons and daughters leaving for Palestine at the train station in Germany. One strong memory Kochavi has is the loneliness and longing all children felt as they experienced their first times alone, without their parents.

1st hour, minutes 47 through 50

Kochavi returns to discussing the times when he still lived in Germany. He remembers purchasing a German newspaper which promoted Nazi propaganda, and how his father grew very angry with him for buying the paper at the time of Hindenburg's death. Kochavi said that Hitler's mission was never discussed at by the children at school.

1st hour, minutes 51 through 57

Kochavi remembers the Nuremberg Laws. He was 13 at the time, and a boy in his class said that the laws were good, thinking that they would protect the Jews. Kochavi became enraged with the boy. At this time, he realized that Hitler's hatred of the Jews was OFFICIAL..

When Hitler rose to power, Kochavi's parents switched off the radio-they would not listen to any of Hitler's speeches. However, Kochavi was still intrigued by the

powerful Nazi officials. When he was going to the pharmacy to get some medicine, **Kochavi** once saw Goebbels, a famous Nazi official.

Kochavi says that he does not speak like a survivor (probably because he did not go through the concentration camps). He has not even told his own children about his experiences.

1st hour, minutes 57 through 2nd hour, first minute

Kochavi chats about the official lounge of the Zionist youth movement in Germany, which was in existence until 1938. Activities were held until the time the Gestapo came into being. A Nazi once came into his school and shook hands with a teacher, and sat in on a lesson about Napoleon, about the Sanhedrin, and about Emancipation.

2nd hour, minutes 1 through 9

Kochavi remembers how difficult school was for him, knowing that he and his Jewish friends might not survive. His mother was always very emotional, and, according to **Kochavi** probably would get in tears if she were asked to speak today about the Holocaust and the events leading up to it.

2nd hour, minutes 9 through 14

Kochavi remembers that he and his family would not talk about current events until 1937, because his parents and others believed that every child would be fine.

In the meantime, at the Camp for Children's Aliya, there were 5,000 children. The Youth Movement went on. The people in Palestine learned agriculture and Hebrew. Even **Kochavi** was a teacher. He talks of how he was convinced to be a counselor for the Movement.

2nd hour, minutes 14 through 24

Kochavi recalls another incident where he went to buy beer for his father in Germany, and when he was unsure of the price he needed to pay, the clerk made a nasty crack. At another time, an official came to collect money German Marks and **Kochavi's** parents were not home. The man said that **Kochavi** was lucky and smart that his parents were not home. **Kochavi** claimed that in general, he never truly felt anti-semitism directed at him. He did see, however, the red and black marks against Jews made at professional offices. such as at his dentist's once, which was run by a Jewish man

Kochavi's parents did not want him to go out in the streets of Germany because he did not have blonde hair, and the school he attended was near Nazi offices. Until 1935, **Kochavi** said that things seemed normal. In West Berlin, **Kochavi** claims that he did not face anti-semitism.

2nd hour, minutes 24 through 34

Kochavi remembers how he lived in Palestine as he fled the Nazis. He felt highly devoted to his class.

Kochavi also was in the First Delegation from Palestine, where he got tickets to

travel to France. He knew he was destined to travel. He wanted to hear German words because he was proud of his country of origin. When people called him "comrade," in Germany, he was shocked. After the war, Kochavi recalls feeling like a victor when he returned to Germany. In 1946, he returned, went to Hannover, Germany, and got "parole" from his duties, but he later found out that the place was no longer in existence. He went home (to Berlin), and realized that he could have walked to his old house. But, he had enough, and he wanted to escape.

2nd hour, minutes 34 through 38

In Palestine, in 1941, Kochavi heard that his mother died, possibly receiving the information from a letter written by his father. In 1942, Kochavi's father died, and Kochavi learned that his mother had committed suicide.

Kochavi also discussed how his mother and father could have easily been killed because his father was a Jewish skilled worker; he was a dentist.

2nd hour, minutes 38 through 45

Kochavi remembers how he came to Palestine and identified strongly with the people in Nes Tziona in 1940. He tells how he was a counselor with the Jewish Israeli Youth, at Amuhad and Kibbutz Kronskey. He recalls never feeling lonely in Palestine, though he was alone because he had a great counselor and mentor. Kochavi learned how to speak, read, and write in Yiddish.

2nd hour, minutes 45 through 50

Kochavi talks about how he felt superior to the Nazis; he felt he had something they did not. His personal victory was that he could transfer his connection to Germany to be productive elsewhere.

2nd hour, minutes 50 through 52

In the first years of teaching, Kochavi remembers that he had no clue as to what he should expect of himself. He learned later to become more realistic; he accepted that life was not always going to go "his way."
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2nd hour, minutes 52 through 56

Kochavi believes that it does not matter that his children do not know his life story. According to him, he did not try to bring up the subject in any structured conversation. In fact, on the day of the interview, the children did not even know that their father was being interviewed. Even one of his children, Gidi, never asked. However, Kochavi remarked that he had a different kind of relationship with Gidi, (indicating that Gidi knew some of his father's life history.) Kochavi parts, saying that he was happy to have told his story, and that he is satisfied with his life, lot and fate.

