

RG-50.120\*085

**Lebel, Genia**

**Tape 1 of 3**

- 1.01 Born in June 1927, in Nis (where her father was a mining engineer) until she finished kindergarten when the family returned to Belgrade. She had one older brother. Describes the limited observance of Jewish customs at home (where the language was Serbo-Croatian), and how she became aware of being Jewish as she started school in Belgrade and had separate religion classes. She also describes her high school experiences and becoming aware of the political environment.
- 1.40 In September 1940, her brother was prohibited from entering the university because of Numerus Clausus. She became politically active in the “anti-fascist” movements and the Jewish schools’ composition changed. General public was indifferent.
- 2.01 The Jewish population felt the situation because of the many refugees that passed through. Most were German speaking (not from Poland) and in transit. If they missed connections (stuck in Sava or Sarback??) they eventually perished in gas trucks, including some of her relatives. Appeals to authorities for help for not answered and anti-Jewish restrictions were increased.
- 2.13 Describes changes in government and rules between March 25<sup>th</sup> and April 6<sup>th</sup>. Talks about student demonstrations, her own involvement and her father’s recruitment to mine work.
- 2.24 Describes the sudden bombing of Belgrade and the Germans entry on April 12, 1941. Jews were to register by April 17<sup>th</sup> – there was a curfew, her house was full of displaced relatives and there were many hardships. As a 13-year-old, she was less conspicuous and could help. Her brother had taken to work with corpses and her mother cleaned toilets.
- 2.56 Further descriptions of the fate of Jews in different provinces: in Banosh ??? Jews attempted to escape, to obtain documents. July-August 1941, feeling danger but not yet organized.
- 3.14 Brother managed to obtain documents and eventually escape. She saw him only in December 1945.
- 3.21 Camps were being prepared for Jewish women and children (Boniza, Toposgeshulka???). She saw her dog killed by Germans. Fearing for her life, she left alone for the train. She was not yet 14 years old.
- 3.32 Describes contacting her old kindergarten teacher, Yelena, who was working for the partisans and she joined her. Describes how she obtained “documents” and a new identity; the partisans’ organization; and their publication and leaflets. Some

“members” turned them in, there were searches, and they were arrested on February 22, 1943.

**Tape 2 of 3**

- 4.11 Relates stories and more memories from earlier time there. Her friendship with Rasco Dinish.
  
- 4.24 Describes her and Yelena’s interrogation regarding arms (were caught February 22, 1943). How they were tortured; found out about partisans who were collaborators and informed on them. Zoran and his fate. Yelena was executed later when transferred to Red Cross Camp (“Buban’s” place??). Relates other events that happened there.
  
- 4.56 Describes more transfers: passage through Serbia-Croatia, her and the others’ conditions in Mariburg on the River Drava, escaped onto a train, caught and placed in a labor camp repairing cables. Assumed a new identity (Yoran Kalagy from Wiener-Neustadt). Describes the many different refugees (mostly non-Jews). Their camp was near an airport housing special planes and was, therefore, bombarded frequently. Describes her assignments and how her translating skills saved her many times. Escaped after heavy bombardment (by that time, allies landed in Sicily – September 1943); loaded onto a truck that took them via Prague and Vienna to Berlin (after July’s 1944 attempted assassination of Hitler).
  
- 5.30 The Gestapo housed them in 31 Oranienburg near Berlin synagogue that was burned in Crystal Night. Describes the small concrete cell that housed between 14 and 24 women; terrible living conditions; the other inmates; the three kinds of guards, of which one Yugoslav woman was the worst. Describes the interrogation relating to arms; her role as a translator; being moved to another location during bombardment; her physical collapse; and beatings. All were condemned to die. There were informers inside the cell. As bombardment increased, they were moved to German underground shelters.
  
- 6.21 Under intense bombardment all prisoners were released and she escaped with friend Dana into chaotic and destroyed streets. Italian prisoners cut up a wounded horse for food. Looked to hide in an intact house. Encountered Soviet soldiers whose commander protected the two from rape by some. Day of liberation – April 29, 1945.
  
- 6.37 Describes her and Dana’s wandering on their way home, encounters with many other prisoners of war, her bad experiences especially with the Russians, their long train trip in the wrong direction until they got off at Lemberg, returning to the Hungarian-Yugoslav border. She finally confided her true identity to Dana but could hardly believe it made no difference to Dana that she was Jewish.
  
- 7.00 Describes coming to Belgrade full of lice and no money. Meeting a childhood friend on the streetcar, her warm reception by his family. Strangers were living in

her own home. Schooling arrangement. Received a postcard from brother and news regarding their father.

**Tape 3 of 3**

- 7.15 Elaboration on earlier Berlin story – adds details to her earlier story when she was imprisoned in Berlin; being hit by Yuri, the fate of other inmates (February/March 1945).
- 7.25 Describes her initial adjustment to life in Belgrade; meeting her father; finishing her schooling; feeling guilty about her survival and better situation compared to others. Describes her work as a journalist for the paper Politika. Although aware of her Jewishness, she identified herself mostly as Yugoslavian.
- 7.46 Only now she found out what happened to her mother who, in 1941, was transported with the remaining women and children via Zaba on the Danube to the Semund station, loaded on the trucks and gassed. 8,500 women and children perished there (at Zamiescie near Krakow). To this day, there is no proper memorial admitting the fate of Jews there.
- 8.00 Elaboration on the topic of recognizing Jewish suffering, communism and anti-Semitism in postwar Yugoslavia. How her own awareness and sense of national identity changed during the periods of political changes in Yugoslavia as well as the establishment of the State of Israel.
- 8.38 She becomes a political prisoner – arrested and investigated following hostile informers (who may have desired her job). Isolated after release, she turns to Zionism.
- 8.56 Moves to Israel. Discusses her life and activities there.
- 9.08 Returns to the story of her imprisonment in Yugoslavia. She wrote a book on that period. She studied the history of the Macedonian Jews. Repeats the story of her arrest and four months of interrogation. Talks about the problem of informers and administrative punishment of hard labor - without trial. Describes terrible work conditions in the mud, other women prisoners (most innocent), and the terrible feeling of being treated this way by one's own countrymen (after the war and after the Germans' defeat). Describes being shipped to St. Gregor Island and the Naked Island (Goliotok???), beatings, and hard labor with rocks. She suffered from night blindness. She experienced 2 ½ years under these conditions until she was finally "pardoned."