

RG-50.120*118
POLITZER YAKOV
11.5.1993

TAPE 1 OF 3

01:01:00 My name is George Politzer. I was born in April 5th 1930, in Silesia, in Cadca 60 km. from Auschwitz. My father was a lawyer, and the leaders of the Jewish community. We had 5,000 people in the town, 800 of them were Jews. My father was 37 years old and my mother 21 when I was born. I went to a Jewish school. My mother was a socialist-communist. She was in charge of my education since my father was sent to represent the Czech regime in Carpatho-Russia. He lived in Irshava. By the age of 12, I knew five languages. Until 1938 I had normal life.

01:05:15 The Jewish community and the Jewish organization were very strong. My skin color is very dark, so I suffered discrimination and abuses from the Christian children. Most of my friends were Jewish, most of them my own family, since we had a very large family (40-50 people). The situation changed when it was forbidden for us to ride bicycles. My father could not appear in the court and then we had to put on the Yellow Star.

01:09:40 My father was Orthodox, and my mother was more progressive, so I absorbed the two cultures. My mother was known as a leftist, close to the communists. In 1940 or 1941 the Slovenians arrested her. She was in a prison for three months until my father succeeded to release her. He heard that she might be caught again and be sent to a labor camp in Poland, so she escaped to Hungary and lived in Budapest.

01:13:20 I was an only son. I always was individualistic, anti-establishment, anti-terrorism.

01:16:15 My grandparents had a hotel and a restaurant. My father was very busy at his work. My mother was very tough with me. Although I came from a very rich family, I had to work for my pocket money. I was not spoiled and I was educated to be independent. My parents went each summer for a trip in the world. I stayed with my grandparents in Irshava. In 1936 my parents went to Palestine. The Slovak Consul asked my father to buy a piece of land on the Hadar in Haifa. My

father donated money to KKL (Keren Kayemet LeIsrael) – the Jewish National Fund. He was a Zionist, but never thought of making Aliya. All his family roots were in Czechoslovakia. He had his family tree from 1698, and he was very proud of it.

01:20:40 My mother was very good in sport. When I was six I knew how to swim and at age seven I knew how to ski.

[Politzer tells about an uncle who died skiing, and about another uncle who was the “black sheep” of the family, and became a world-known expert in running hotels. He spoke 16 languages.]

01:30:00 What did we know about the situation in Germany?
Everyone knew everything, but people didn’t believe it would reach them. Until 1942 we didn’t think of a physical danger.

01:33:40 The end of my normal childhood was when I was ten years old, when my mother escaped to Hungary.

01:37:00 The first people who escaped from Auschwitz arrived in 1941-1942 and no one wanted to believe their stories. We thought it was temporary.

01:41:00 People lived in a false security. There was a “big storm”, a “strong wind”, but we bent our heads and continued till it would pass. Our physical freedom was limited; the Star of David was humiliating. The situation was threatening but not impossible.

01:43:55 Until 1939 Czechoslovakia was my homeland. Judaism was our religion; Zionism was a dream of my father, but not for him to fulfill. In 6.12.1949, he sent me to Israel, but he continued to live in Czechoslovakia until his death in 1960, because of his profession and the family property.

01:51:30 Four years ago I visited my hometown for the first time. Nothing from the proud and prosperous Jewish community was left. On the cemetery they built a condominium. They demolished the synagogue and the community buildings.

02:04:30 Four months after my mother's escape, we had to escape too. In 1942 my father received a message from Bratislava that the Germans planned to take all the Jews from our town to a labor camp in Lublin. My father told everyone about this program, and urged them to escape. We had to decide in one moment to leave everything behind us and to run away. We were the only ones to escape. It was not an easy decision, because we didn't prepare anything in advance. That's why I insisted to describe our life till then: as if nothing terrible was going to happen to us. No one believed that we were in danger to our life. All the members of my father's family were murdered in the camps.

02:12:50 My father explained to me that we were escaping because we did not want to go to a labor camp. No one said anything about extermination camps. We were not allowed to travel in a train, we had the Star of David on our clothes, and we didn't plan in advance where and how to go. It was 5.4.1942. I was 12 years old. We took some belongings in a suitcase; we took off the Star of David and went to the railway station late at night. We went on a train and got by a miracle, to Zwolen on the border of Hungary. We bribed a locomotive driver and got into Hungary. In Budapest I met my mother, but we didn't live together. My mother hid with a Christian family and so did my father with another family. I lived in an institution for mentally retarded children.

02:31:45 I went for missions for the nannies who worked in the institute. My father came to visit me and so did my mother. Once my father was caught with his false papers. He had to cross the border back to Czechoslovakia, but succeeded to come back to Hungary.

02:42:40 I remember the meetings with my parents. My father told me about the progress in the war and said that when it would be over, we would all return to our home.

02:51:20 It was very inconvenient to be in the institution but not impossible. I lived from one day to the next, waiting to meet my parents. My mother told me that after the war she did not want to live with my father because of the age and opinion differences.

My father met a couple, refugees from Zilina, 30 km from our hometown, Cadca. He had a relationship with the woman, and she lived with him after the war.

02:56:00 One day, at the beginning of 1943, a new law was introduced: children under 16 who had relatives in Hungary, could stay with their relatives. I was 13 years old. My father came and told me what to do.

03:02:00 “You have to go to the police and tell them that you came here by yourself and you don’t know where to go. You would be put in a prison for several days, and then your grandfather will tell them he wants you to live with him and with your grandmother.” I did as he told me. After two weeks my grandfather came and took me. We went to Mukacheve, where he lived. It was wonderful for me. A place full of love, but I lost contact with my parents.

03:12:48 I went back to school for almost a year. I didn’t know anything about what happened in Poland. It was the first time for me to see Orthodox Jews in Mukacheve.

03:40:00 On 18 of March 1944, The Germans entered to Hungary and in about 24 hours I was arrested and was put in prison. A German officer asked me: “Where are your parents?” I told him: “I wish I knew.” He didn’t believe me and beat me for three days. He gave up and sent me back to my grandparents.

03:49:58 The Germans told us to take one suitcase and to come to a factory for making blocks. From there they deported us to Poland. My grandfather told me and showed me, before we left, where he buried all the family jewelry in his yard.

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04:05:50 We were loaded into cattle cars for a 3-4 day journey. All together we were 3,000 people in this transport. The only thing we knew was that we were on our way to Poland. My grandfather sat near one of the Hebrew teachers. He told her how sad he was because he didn’t succeed to rescue me and to send me back to my parents in Budapest. Suddenly we heard a shot. It was a shot from outside. It hit the teacher and she fell dead on my grandfather’s shoulder. I was supposed to be sitting near my

grandfather, where she sat, and thus I was saved. A German soldier took her body out and said: "One less Jewish pig."

04:21:50 We still did not have any idea about extermination. We knew that we were going to a labor camp, and the children to a school.

04:24:45 When we arrived at the camp the Germans opened the doors and told us to leave all our belongings in the train. They separated the men from the women and children. I decided to say that I was 12 years old and to go with my grandmother. I looked older than my biological age (14). An old man approached me and told me in Yiddish to say that I was 16 years old and to go with the men. I saw my grandfather and joined him in a second.

04:31:30 All the men over sixty had to get out of the line. My grandfather was sixty-five. I never saw my grandparents again. They were sent to the gas chambers. I found myself with a group of 700-800 out of the 3,000 that arrived at the camp.

04:38:20 We entered a huge hall. We were told to get undressed. I had my precious stamp album with me. I tore out all the stamps. We entered the shower; we were shaved and got our uniform. We got a spoon, a cup, a plate and a bowl.

04:41:05 Back in the camp the Germans discovered that I was too young, but since I had a number they could not let me go, so I was sent to the kinder block. We were several hundred kids there, not only Jews.

04:46:02 I had an advantage because I knew languages, so I worked as a translator. After two days we knew what was going on in the camp, that people were sent to their death.

We had a catastrophe: a Scarlet Fever epidemic. Every day we had an appell and those who were ill, were sent to the gas chamber.

04:49:30 I decided that I had to stay alive because my parents were waiting for me and I was their only child. I fought not for myself but for them.

04:54:05 When I got sick, I told my boss to find a new translator. He liked me and hid me from the Germans. After three days they found me, and I was sent to the Rever Lager (hospital), where Mengele was in charge.

05:01:30 In 1942 one of my nannies, Blanca, came to Birkenau. In 1944 she worked at the "Canada block." When she found me she arranged that I would come to live with her in the women's camp. I can not remember how it was organized.

05:06:00 In the hospital all the patients were Christian. The doctors gave them the best treatment they could. No one was sent to the gas chambers.

In the "Kinder Block" we were 4-5 kids to a bed. I was there only for a short time, since I became sick.

05:12:16 The meeting with Blanca was very exiting. She hid me in piles of cloths. She arranged for me to move to D-LAGER, where people worked in unloading the suitcases of those who arrived at the camp. My job was to run to the electric fence and to smuggle valuable stuff, so we could trade it for food: a golden watch for a loaf of bread, a diamond for one kg. of potatoes.

05:28:00 During all the time that I was in the camp, I didn't work even one day. Birkenau was a death camp. It was rare to be there six months as I was.

01:31:30 We knew what went on in the camp. Every day 12,000 people arrived but only 2,000 came into the camp. We met people who worked as Zonder Commando. They told us about the crematoria. I met a man whose name was Sziss. He worked as a Schriber (registrar). He told me everything. He adopted me as his son, because he had a son my age, but the son went with his mother to Auschwitz and Sziss was sure that he was dead. (This man survived the war and went back to live in Bratislava. His son survived the war too, and by a chance I met him and we were roommates in Kibbutz Nir-Am.)

05:37:30 I got sick again. I had Erythema Dozomeneh. It was a rare disease. When I stood I had blue spots on my legs, when I laid down they

became pink. Prof. Epstein (a Jewish doctor who worked with Dr. Mengele) saw me and called Dr. Mengele to see the attraction.

05:47:50 In the summer of 1944 all the gypsies who lived in LAGER A were exterminated. At first I was so jealous, because they lived as families, and we didn't. I missed my parents and other relative. I was very lonely.

05:54:30 There was no mercy or compassion in Birkenau. Everyone fought for his own survival and existence. When people from my block went to work I hid in the block and prepared for them some food. I was the cook.

06:09:10 In September 1944 the population in Birkenau changed. The transports of Hungarian Jews stopped because no more Jews were left in Hungary except the 100,000 in Budapest that Horti didn't allow the Germans to take. Then came the Jews from Lodz. We heard bombs and we didn't understand why the Allies didn't bomb the railways that brought so many Jews each day to their death.

06:16:00 The people who worked on the trains brought newspapers. The Polish workers in the camp listened to the radio, so we knew what was going on in the war. I remember on 6.6.1944 the invasion of Normandy; we celebrated in the camp the American arrival in Europe. One day we heard shooting in the camp. Later we found out that the Zonder Commando who was about to be replaced and go to the crematorium, organized an uprising and killed some German soldiers. It was the first uprising in Birkenau. It gave us a lot of pride.

06:25:00 For many nights I didn't sleep. I was preoccupied with a plan to tell the Germans that it was a mistake for me to be in the camp because I was not a complete Jew since I was not fully circumcised. But I was afraid that my plan would not work for me, and I would be sent to the crematorium.

06:32:50 We heard rumors of S.S. soldiers who raped the Jewish prisoners. I had two attempts at a sexual relationship with me, which I rejected immediately. The sex impulse was so weak because our physical condition was so bad. When I got to the camp my weight was 72 kg. In the camp I weighed 60 kg. When I was liberated my weight was 35 kg.

06:37:10 In October 1944 we heard that the Germans wanted to close the camp. One day we had a huge selection of 100,000 people. Mengele and some helpers made the selection and decided who would go to the crematorium and who – to the labor camp. When my turn came, Mengele decided to send me to the crematorium. I said: “Damn! For half a year I succeeded to stay alive and now when it was almost the end, I had to go to my death.” Then I heard someone calling me. Without any reasonable explanation, Mengele changed his mind and sent me to a labor camp.

06:42:20 I was shocked. It was more than a miracle. We got some bread and water. We were loaded into cattle cars for a 3-4 day journey, this time to the West. We were 2,000-3,000 people on the train. We suffered from starvation. We arrived at a factory named “Hinkle” for assembling planes in Oranienburg which was a labor camp near Sachsenhausen. It was an extermination camp.

06:55:00 A German soldier got on the train and beat us with a whip. I was the youngest, so the people lifted me up in their hands, but I fell on the ground. A soldier with a big dog approached me. The dog bit me so badly that part of my leg was in his mouth but I managed to run away to the appeal. After five minutes I fainted from loss of blood. I found myself in a hospital, where I was for three months, from October 1943 to January 1944.

06:59:00 In the hospital I got sick with: Pluerotis-exsokitiva. My lungs were full with fluid (water), causing my heart to move to the right side of my body. I was in a very bad state. They made me Fuctia: with a needle of 10 cm (?). They pumped out liters of water. They cured me.

07:00:30 Most of the patients in the hospital were Christians. The conditions were fairly good. We had bed sheets, food and cards to play with. In a bed next to me was a Russian colonel. He told me about the Bolshevik Revolution, how brutal they were, and persuaded me to hate the Communists, since they were terrorists and I had enough of Nazi terrorism.

TAPE 3 OF 3 (12.7.1998)

07:05:40 I was three month in Oranienburg, where I got reasonable treatment. It was the hospital of the factory. Those who were not able to get back to work were sent immediately to Sachsenhausen for extermination. In January 1945 we heard from German political prisoners that the Germans collapsed and the Russians were getting closer. Our factory was 60 km from Berlin and we could hear the bombs.

07:20:00 I am sure that the doctors liked me as a young intelligent child and they decided not to send me to Sachsenhausen. I was sure I would die before the war was over so I would not be able to tell my story. All that happened to me were miracles.

07:23:30 On January 1945 the Germans decided to put an end to the camp. We were loaded again on a train to Mauthausen. The German order was about to collapse. There was no room for us in the camp, so we were put in tents. The weather was extremely cold. We didn't have blankets, so we lay on each other in order to get warm. We were full of lice. We didn't get food. We didn't work. The Germans didn't know what to do with us.

07:28:50 We were 3-4 weeks in the camp. Many people, mainly youth from labor camps in Hungary, came to the camp. We desperately looked for food. We suffered from real starvation. Then one day we were told to line up, 5,000 people. We were divided into groups of 100 people and we were forced to march out of the camp. It was known later as the death march. Without shoes, without food, with a German soldier with a machine gun, who shot anyone who was half a meter behind the others, we walked for three days. I walked with my will not with my body.

07:41:00 From 5,000 who started the death march, we arrived 2,000 to the middle of a forest in Austria. It was the end of March beginning of April 1945. I was 3-4 weeks in this camp. We didn't have any food.

07:51:00 I told myself that I could not die now. I could not do it to my mother. I had to live. I became a muselman. People ate everything they could find. They ate snails, they even ate human flesh from dead bodies. I ate grass and some burned bones of a cow or a horse. I met a man and his son who were from Hungary. We became very close friends. We were all about to die from starvation.

08:01:30 One evening we heard shots and we saw that the German guards ran away from their guard towers. We (the three of us) opened the fence of the camp and started to walk. We were in the middle of the forest. After some hours we saw lights and a road. We stood on the road and a car came. Out of the car jumped three African American soldiers. They went on.

08:05:00 We continued to walk about 6 km and we arrived to a city: Wels. We found an empty apartment, got in and searched for food. We found plenty of food and started to eat like mad. After two hours the father of my friend died from eating too much.

08:10:05 We were told that the American army entered the city. I decided to go home to look for my parents. We found a car and decided to take it in order to get to Budapest. The next morning we realized that someone had stolen "our" car. In about 3-4 days the American soldiers gathered the survivors and put them in a hospital in Hersing (?). German prisoners of war treated us. It was humiliating for us, but the Americans were not sensitive to that. It took me a month and a half to gain some weight and to be able to get out of the hospital.

08:18:00 I had two options: one to go to Budapest, the other to go to Bratislava. I wanted to cross the border to the Russian side. I went on a boat on the Danube to a city named Melk. I was in a monastery for several days and then with a train on my way to Bratislava. But the train stopped 60 km from the place to which I wanted to go. I went off the train and waited. A Russian tank came and took me to a city named Sopron in Hungary. I went to some Jewish organization, where I got for the first time after the war a document and some money. I bought half a kg of butter and ate it without bread. I went on a train to Budapest and sat on the roof with some youngsters, because there was no room in the train.

08:26:50 I arrived at my uncle's house, and found him there. I asked him about my parents. He told me that my father was in Bratislava and he was looking desperately to find me and that my mother died. My whole world collapsed. I went through all this hell only because of my mother, and now I lost her. Then he told me how she died. It was one day after the liberation. The Armada of General Mantkovski liberated Budapest. My mother was 37 years old. She was with two other women in an apartment. The Russian soldiers came to the building, took all the men and arrested them in the basement. Then they came to the apartment where my mother was. They

wanted to rape the women. My mother talked to them trying to convince them not to be so brutal. They said they would go out to drink more vodka and then they would come back. When they left the men from the basement succeeded to get out and knocked on the door of my mother's apartment. My mother thought that the Russian soldiers came back and decided to escape. She went to the balcony to jump, her shoe got stuck on a railing and she landed on her head instead of her feet. She died immediately. The Russians who came back saw the panic and ran away.

08:30:30 My uncle took me to my mother's grave, where I ended my relationship with God forever. My father declared a money prize for any information about me. One man who was with me in Auschwitz recognized me in a photo. He wanted the money so he told my father that I was frozen to death in a Gleiwitz in February 1942. My uncle told my father about me and sent me to him on a bus.

08:34:00 We went back to Cadca. Out of 800 Jews before the war, we were 15. We didn't get our house back. We lived in the Rabbi's house and my father started to restore his office. I told my father everything that happened to me. I was 15 years old. I went back to school in Zilina. During the weekdays I lived with an old lady in Zilina and on the weekends I came to my father in Cadca. We were very few Jews in the school. We suffered from Anti-Semitism. When Masarik was murdered in the spring of 1948 and the state became Communist, I told my father I decided to go to Palestine. My father wanted me to finish school and to go to the university and only after my PhD to go to where I wanted. I asked my father to join me. I even asked him in 1945 to sell some of the property and to send the money to Switzerland. But he didn't listen to me. I was too young for him to consider my suggestions.

08:47:20 My father built a house for me, with 12 apartments in Zilina. One apartment he gave to the couple he met in Budapest. The couple got divorced. The husband with his son came to Israel and the woman lived with my father. I worked as a smuggler. I smuggled Jews from Hungary to Slovakia. From there to Bratislava and from there to Vienna and to Israel.

08:52:00 My turn arrived to go to Israel. With a suitcase and \$300 in my pocket I went to Italy. We went on the "Kaserta" (?) ship for 4-5 days. We arrived in Haifa, went on trucks to kibbutz Nir-Am in the Negev. It was the end of the world near the Gaza border.

Mr. Politzer talked about his experience on the kibbutz. First he worked in the fields and then he was moved to the bakery.

09:04:20 – 09:53:25 Mr. Politzer summarized his story in English.

His conclusion: I told my father I will never want to belong to a minority. I would like to belong to the majority. If I was strong enough to go through Auschwitz, I will be able to live in Israel. I believe every Jew should live in Israel, because here we can fight for our life.