

RG-50.120 #143 3 Tapes
ELIMELECH SHKLAR

Tape 1

- 100.58 Elimelech Shklar was born on the 9th of Av, 1919 in a village northwest of Warsaw [Zuromin?]. He was born 2 ½ months after his father fell in WWI, and was given his father's name. His mother re-married 2 ½ years later. 3 more children were born. Elimelech, the oldest, had to help from an early age.
- 3.18 His house belonged to the anti-Zionist Bund, but his mother sent him to a school where also Hebrew was taught.
- 3.44 At age 11, he also had to begin attending public school, where there were only 2 Jews. Those 2 excelled in their studies and were often praised publicly. The geography teacher had Elimelech test the students in his class. They studied until 1 p.m.. The 'cheder' began at 1:30 pm, and went to 6 p.m.
- 5.05 After dinner, he studied Hebrew at home, with a private tutor. The tutor didn't collect money from Elimelech, as the tutor's 3 children also studied together. They read newspapers and literary publications in Hebrew, and achieved a high level of competency.
- 5.55 At age 14 he went to visit his uncle to a village in the west of Poland, the registered in a trade school for the building of machines [he was the only Jew there, and he declared his mother tongue to be Hebrew].
- 9.09 In 1935, after the death of Pilsusky, attacks began against the Jews.
- 10.22 Elimelech suffered hunger and got some free food from a school 'soup kitchen'. He was also given a stipend for his studies. But, with all that, he suffered also anti-Semitic attacks.
- 17.00 After graduation, Elimelech rented a furnished room at the house of a Polish family, where were very generous to him.
- 18.00 Elimelech had a large family in New York: his grandparents, and 7 aunts and uncles with their families. They supported him.
- 19.13 Elimelech's step-father worked making and selling clothes.

- 19.45 When grandfather died, in 1936, Elimelech asked one of his uncles for help. He worked briefly in a smithy in his hometown. He was 18.
- 20.00 First job in Warsaw. How he got it.
- 30.00 Sept. 1, 1939, planes dropped leaflets to the Jews, promising them a 'new' year. Later in the day, bombing of a Jewish meeting point in the center of Warsaw.
- 34.07 Bombing on Yom Kippur, with incendiary bombs and more.
- 38.00 Poland's surrender and the arrival of the German army in Warsaw.
- 41.00 Eli's return to his native village, through Plouisk.
- 43.12 Nazis burned the synagogue on Simchat Torah. Began recruiting youth for forced labor in agriculture. He was sent to work 30 km. From his village. They collected potatoes.
- 44.57 After 3 weeks, they were sent home, on foot. It was Nov. 7, 1939.
- 46.10 Jews were called in the middle of the night to gather in a public hall, where they were robbed of all their valuables, and then deported. Eli's family decided to join the exiles, but he stayed behind for a while.
- 56.00 His deportation on a train. Arrival in Novi Dvor. Some Jews were left there and given shelter. He decided to leave the group and make his way to join the family in Warsaw.
- 2.00.50 Arrival in Warsaw on Nov. 11, 1939. This was Poland's Independence Day and Armistice Day.
- 02.30 Reunion with his parents and 2 of his siblings.
- 03.19 Eli was forced to go back to his home town to retrieve the money his step-father had hidden there. His trip there and back.
- 07.46 After a short time of tranquility, Jews began to be send to forced labor.
- 10.00 Short stay in Mlava, and his business.
- 14.00 On Yom Kippur the Warsaw ghetto was closed.

- 16.45 Eli saw many young Jews being sent east, and never heard from again.
- 21.23 Eli decided to escape the ghetto. The trolley still went through the ghetto. He jumped on it, passing as a Pole doing contraband, and went on the direction of Danzig, by train, to Mlava.
- 36.37 Mlava was also enclosed in a ghetto already.
- 38.45 Eli managed to send money to his parents. In 1941, his stepfather died.
- 39.56 In 1941, 100 young Jews were sent to pave roads 40-50 km. From the ghetto.
- 44.32 June 22, 1941. German planes flew eastward. War with Russia broke out.
- 45.47 Return to Mlava in the winter.
- 46.00 Letters from home were disheartening.
- 47.43 News arrived that Eli's mother and older sister died of hunger.
- 48.21 Hangings in Mlava, and executions.
- 50.00 Eli's work in the work-camp, as a key maker.
- 56.30 Nov. 18, 1942. They found out that the Nazis were killing Jews in Malkinia, outside of Warsaw.
- 59.52 The conditions of the Mlava ghetto were better than the ones in Warsaw. Rumors about Auschwitz.
- 3.00.41 Deportations from Mlava began, to Treblinka.
- 04.11 Nov. 18, Eli was deported too [in a regular passenger train] via Chestokhova, Silesia, to an extermination camp: to Auschwitz.
- 18.00 Tattooing the number on the arm.
- 19.39 Ranking of prisoners in Auschwitz: lowest were the Jews.
- 23.00 Eli and other 130 youth were sent to 'building' school

- 25.00 Eating rations.
- 28.00 Classification of prisoners through color triangles.
- 33.00 Eli's prophecy of the fall of Stalingrad, based on a Hebrew text.
- 35.00 Eli's impressions of human suffering around him.
- 43.00 Eli's camp, Birkenau 1, was considered a show place to the world, and was kept meticulously clean.
- 45.58 After 2-3 months of building training, they were put to work.
- 47.12 The Mufti of Jerusalem, with a large entourage, visits Auschwitz [around May 1943].
- 50.00 Trading with the people outside camp.
- 53.00 Eli is appointed supervision of his group of 10 builders.
- 55.43 Sallah, Eli's girl friend, works in agriculture, on the growing of a special flower, from Central Asia, whose sap was good to manufacture rubber. In time, Eli escaped from his building work, to work there. A huge hot house was erected in order to be able to grow the flower in the winter as well, and to prevent its pollinization by other flowers.
- 04.03.45 Eli began his work there in mid 1943, in the fields which were outside Auschwitz.

TAPE II

- 7.00 Obtaining \$20, in red paper, guaranteed in gold. Exchanging it for a kilo of sugar. Another bill like it, was exchanged for 8-10 eggs.
- 11.21 Smuggling sausages through the sewers.
- 14.43 Purchase of a revolver with 36 bullets from an SS officer, in exchange of \$2,000 [four bills of \$400 each, used in those times] The goal of the group of Eli's friends, was to resist in case the Germans tried to kill them.
- 24.26 Attempt to escape failed because of lack of contacts outside the camp.
- 26.01 American planes bombed the outskirts of Auschwitz, where storage buildings were located.

- 31.00 Hothouse was located in Rajshko, 2 ½ km. outside Auschwitz.
- 37.25 Human experiments done on Greek Jewish women, especially in building 10.
- 38.26 Mid 1944, Germans established a bordello in the camp, in block 24, It contained 20 prostitutes. Eli thinks that there were no Jews among them. The bordello was for the non-Jewish prisoners; women given as prize for good work.
- 40.24 A swimming pool was also built for non-Jews.
- 46.50 The suffering of the Hungarian and Greek Jews, after their arrival in Auschwitz - Birkenau.
- 48.00 The sight of 300 women, heads shaved, wearing the uniforms of the murdered Soviet soldiers, gathering prickly vegetables from the fields, with bloody hands.
- 56.36 While Eli was hospitalized with pleuresy, he heard that the Sonderkomando group was killed, not to let anyone know that they had been working in the decimation of the bodies of the Jewish victims, in October 1944.
- 57.28 On a Sunday, when feeling better, Eli asked a male nurse to help him leave the hospital. He did. Next day all the other patients were gassed.
- 5.00.00 The best cooperation among the Jewish groups was between Polish and Hungarian Jews. In the first case, the contact was in Hebrew.
- 11.56 May 1943. Orders came not to hit the Jewish workers during work time. Also, a group of 200 children, condemned to death, was suddenly saved. It was to the credit of a new camp commander....who didn't last long. After the war, that commander was tried in Poland, and given 7 years in prison only, due to his humane attitude.
- 16.31 The celebration of Eli's 25th birthday, in Auschwitz.
- 17.00 Eli as foreman during the period he worked in construction.
- 25.00 Disinfections at Auschwitz.
- 29.04 The rebellion of the remaining 400 Sonderkommando.
- 32.46 The death march, Jan. 18, 1945.

34.00 More about work at Rajsko. Information about the Allies Normandie invasion reaches the prisoners.

46.00 More about the Death march.

47.00 Eli's escape, 16-17 km. from the city Lobibogumin in Czeckoslovakie.

6.00.00 The eventual return to the ruins of Warsaw.

7.00.00 The return to Mlava.

7.50 The way to Danzig.

8.00 Last visit to Eli's home, in Zuromin.

TAPE III

22.19 Travelling to the Russian zones, towards Berlin.

25.41 Arrival in Wender, the Potsdam, then to Magdeburg, all the time going west.

34.22 Passage to the English-held zone.

37.18 Arrival in Essen, going towards Frankfurt. Stop off at Marburg, a university city. Sleeping accommodations in jail-beds. Work in American army kitchen.

43.00 Finding a house to sleep in.

47.00 Letter sending through the American army.

50.00 Pleuresy strikes again.

53.00 Plans to emigrate to Israel, via France.

8.00.15 Meeting with Ben Gurion, who was in Paris.

2.19 Travelling to the south of France, near Toulouse, to await a ship to take them to Israel. Life in a palace there. All together, there were 28 people.

- 3.00 An important visit from the Joint.
- 7.00 Organization of that group house.
- 11.00 Most of the group receives the OK to sail to Israel, through a little port near Marseilles, l'Asiotea [?]
- 14.17 Memory from October, 194, after the decimation of the Hungarian Jews. Germans tried to hide their deeds by destroying the evidence. Eli was in a group forced to work on a Sunday to destroy the crematoria. He saw by himself the gas chambers, measured them and explored how they were made [utilizing his knowledge as a mechanic] and how they worked. [Rocks were made to look like soap bars.]
- 25.00 733 illegal immigrants sailed from France to Israel. Eli's group was in charge of the discipline.
- 28.12 The trip lasted 18 days. 100 km from Israel's coast, they were spotted by an English plane. British bordered the ship the next day. The immigrants saw the snow-covered Herson mountain.
- 30.00 After arrival in Haifa, they were sent to Atlit for registration. After a week, when everyone had gotten certificates, they were freed.
- 32.00 They arrived in Tel Aviv on the eve of Passover to the Immigrants Home, on Alyiah street.
- 32.57 Emotional seder at Eli's cousins home. He found employment immediately, in a factory of --?---- parts. A while later, they opened their own workshop after the War of Independence.