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Vruvlevski, Misha Tape 1 of 2

- 0.00 Also called Mischa Wasserman (Yiddish), Michal Wroblewski (Polish), or Misha Vruvlevski (Belorussian or Russian). He used the Polish version in professional work after the war while working in Sweden.
- 1.01 He was born in Pinsk, September 29, 1911, a small Russian city.
- 1.02 From the end of 1918, was part of reconstituted Poland
- 1.03 Childhood father a Yiddish language teacher; mother a physician; She was from a shtetl in Belarus. Russian and Yiddish spoken in the home.
- 1.04 Warm house; father did not attend synagogue; mother was religious  
Most of Pinsk population was Polish, nobles; Jews lived in shtetl
- 1.05 Polish authorities tried to Polonize Jewish population after 1918.
- 1.06 Father left home in 1914 to join Tsarist Army.  
Misha attends Hader, progressive Jewish school; coeducational; Russian language of instruction
- 1.07 Rebbe headmaster; learned to love reading books.
- 1.09 At end of war in 1918, goes to Polish school, learns Polish language, few students knew it.
- 1.10 Polish administration replaces Russian; teachers and administrators Polish nobility from large estates.
- 1.11 1924, his mother dies
- 1.12 Enjoys school with sympathetic Polish teachers
- 1.13 No feelings of anti-Semitism evident at the school
- 1.14 Passes exam to attend Polish humanities gymnasium
- 1.15 Starts third grade.
- 1.16 Only four of the 40 pupils are Jewish, as allowed under "numerus clausus."
- 1.17 Many good friends, speak Yiddish, Russian, and Polish. Jewish neighborhood.

- 1.18 Pinsk had a rich tradition of education. Also private school for rich Jewish girls, "Tarbut," with Hebrew as language of instruction.
- 1.20 He also attends father's Yiddish language school. Misha belongs to Bund party for a short while, most Jews did not. Jewish girls learn sewing and handiwork.
- 1.21 Thanks to Yiddish language he could speak German with the Nazis
- 1.22 Other girls and boys attended trade schools, Jews spoke Yiddish.
- 1.23 Next he attends private Russian realgymnasium.
- 1.24 Life in Pinsk quiet. Built on swampy land. Match factory. Celebrated Sabbath. Many small stores. Life hard and uncertain. Famous Hasid Rebbe.
- 1.28 Many Hasids from Pinsk emigrate to New York City before the war, such as
- 1.29 Chaim Weizman attended Russian language school in Pinsk. Misha saw his photo in a museum in Israel.
- 1.31 Politics. Misha not interested in Jewish political life, but followed his father. Bund, Zukunft, youth party; Poale Sion, left and right wing parties, communists. Lasted to 1939.
- 1.32 Many Jews from Pinsk, including his cousins, emigrated to Palestine to build Jewish state. Poles took over banks, schools, other institutions. Jews spoke Yiddish.
- 1.39 1931, after gymnasium, no further education allowed in Pinsk. Went to Warsaw to study.
- 1.41 Considered alternatives, Italy, Czechoslovakia. Describes life in Pinsk.
- 1.49 Tells of Polish pogroms in 1917, against Jews. Took a Russian girl from her home, tried to baptize her Polish Catholic, but let her go. Mobs cut beards of Jewish men, burned homes and shops, beat Jews.
- 1.50 Bolshevik Revolution. They took Pinsk, 1917. Klezmer band played for Red Army. Poles did not forget this and took revenge after Russians left.
- 1.51 1920 war, supported Poland against Red Army
- 1.55 Misha moves to Warsaw, goes to work for Janusz Korczak at his Jewish orphanage, as a male nurse for children. Misha knew only that Korczak wrote children's books, nothing else.

- 1.59 Misha tries to join Polish Army, but denied commission because he would not become Catholic. Sees growth of anti-Semitism in Warsaw.
- 2.04 Discusses Pinsk again. Polish director of his school was honorable man to all students. Best friend a Russian. One teacher was anti-Semitic.
- 2.09 Goes to work full time from September 1, 1931, at the orphanage. Worked under Stefania Wilczynska, deputy head. Attended trade school and worked at orphanage. 20 other young men and women worked, went to school. Did theater, sports, movies, and excursions. Korczak had the ideas. Pani Wilczynska got things done. All meals taken together. Stage plays. Children attended local schools.
- 2.33 Description of Korczak's character. Listened to children, wrote stories for them, never shouted, confident, loved by everyone. 150 children attended ten different regular Polish government schools. No uniforms, but were inspected daily. Korczak proper man, always wore a suit. A physician, so attended sick boys. Lived in attic of school, fourth floor. Daily sick call before breakfast. Summer camp near Warsaw.
- 2.48 Told stories on Friday, always the same one, then typed up and published them.
- 2.52 Korczak organized court with trials to review conduct of children and himself. Settled disputes. Took great interest in political parties of all kinds, but did not belong to any.
- 2.58 Grew up in an assimilated Jewish family. Served in Tsarist Army in War. Demobilized to Warsaw after 1917 Revolution.
- 3.01 Worked in orphanage for war orphans in Kiev, then fled to Warsaw.
- 3.04 Korczak started philanthropic institute funded by rich Jews. Didn't discuss his left wing views. Careful of his communist ideas, feared damage to reputation of orphanage.
- 3.07 Misha wanted to study engineering after Pinsk. Lost interest after working at orphanage. Sent to pedagogical institute where Korczak lectured. Dated a student from Warsaw University, later married her.
- 3.12 He worked the night shift at orphanage, 8 P.M. to 7 A.M., living in big room with boys. Bed-wetting issues.
- 3.22 May Day celebration in his dormitory.
- 3.23 Korczak organized "Children's Republic of Warsaw," with elected parliament and

- court system. "Codex Korczak," rules for children to follow. Court handled problems and complaints.
- 3.30 Misha organized lottery for children on what Korczak wrote in books. Description of group behavior in orphanage, how rules worked.
  - 3.35 Korczak punished by his own court on three offenses, including sliding on a bannister.
  - 3.39 Plebiscite held to vote on how well children fit into the group. Korczak called King of the Children.
  - 3.44 All staff and children had daily work assignments, like cleaning toilets.
  - 3.48 Misha stayed at orphanage from 1936 or 37, graduates from his school. Then was paid poorly on staff. Read news of the week to children on Saturdays.
  - 3.49 Gets married and lives outside orphanage up to 1939.
  - 3.51 Misha tells of Pilsudski coup d'etat in 1926. Anti-Semitism in Warsaw, at the University, numerus clausus against Jews. Jews killed in cities.
  - 3.53 Misha not political, but belonged to teacher's union. Was told to strike against Korczak but refused. He lost confidence in orphanage when that happened.
  - 3.54 Korczak goes to Palestine in 1920s to lecture on children, write plays and stories.
  - 3.57 1939, Misha felt war was coming on. Poland too weak to resist Germans. Refused to join Soviets against them.
  - 3.59 War. Korczak adapted well to bad conditions, orphanage worked. Jews blamed by Poles for war. His father came from Jewish family, was a divorce lawyer. So he never got married.

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Vruvlevski, Misha Tape 2 of 2

4.02 War breaks out.

Korczak family. Grandfather a doctor. Named Goldschmit. Belonged to Haskala, Jewish movement of intelligentsia, to get out of psychological ghetto. Open window to world. Had been completely closed from Polish world. Partially assimilated. Mother died of typhus. Korczak's parents science writers. Divorced.

4.05 Korczak a "Polonize Jew" who wanted to make a better world through education.

4.07 believed in quality for all, for women, adults, and children. Had directed another orphanage. Knew Polish women from working in Kiev. A modern pedagogue. Misha calls him a child in spirit. Never married, no children of his own. His father went mad when he was a young boy, so Korczak was afraid to pass on his father's bad genes. Put all his love into "our miraculous children."

4.13 Where did the children come from? At #22 Krochmalna in Bielany neighborhood. From poorest classes, no parents.

4.14 Could enroll five to seven children a year from Warsaw Jewish proletariat.

4.16 Some criticized Korczak for taken children only up to fourteen years old. He felt they needed more specialized education. Top students went for more education, other hired by rich protectors who funded the school. Many graduates went to Israel. Have wonderful memories.

4.22 War breaks out, September 1, 1939. Artillery blew off roof of orphanage. Misha moved into orphanage.

4.25 Korczak quieted children, took charge. Was Major in Polish Army. Spoke to Polish children on the radio, "A Chat with the Old Doctor," but could tell who he was, due to anti-Semitism.

4.28 Korczak refused to flee to Wilno, would be futile. Polish too weak and unprepared to resist.

4.30 Korczak prolific writer, children's law, child rearing, translated into other language.

4.33 Germans occupy Warsaw, pogroms, Jews killed, they were surprised at a "cultured nation."

- 4.34 Germans take orphanage, moved children to school building on Ulica Chlodna (Chlodna Street) for a year, then to the "closed quarter," the Jewish ghetto, Ulica Sliska #9, building not suitable for orphans. Girls and boys together in big rooms.
- 4.38 Korczak had small room and 6-bed hospital.
- 4.40 Took on more children from ghetto, up to 200. Very cold. Doctor begged food and money from other Jews.
- 4.43 Misha started up a normal daily routine of duties and lessons.
- 4.44 Korczak now over 60, tired and sick, water in lungs. Worked hard, always received well. Heard things were worse in other places.
- 4.49 Korczak wrote memoirs in ghetto, reflections on his life and faith in people.
- 4.50 Korczak confronts SS-man, handles it well.
- 4.52 Misha makes money for orphanage by collecting glass. Had a bicycle. Pays rent.
- 4.56 Germans respected Korczak. Allowed Misha to work on the Aryan side, put boys to work with German Jews. Traded goods for food on the Aryan side, smuggled potatoes across the line.
- 4.59 August 5, 1942, special action started against Jews in ghetto. Orphanage staff worked through it. ,
- 5.04 Misha critical of Wajda movie on the orphanage. Lived and worked as normally as possible. Children had nightmare. Observed Jewish holidays.
- 5.10 Staged plays as before. No applause. Korczak said it was "... ready ourselves for a quiet death."
- 5.15 Even Nazis brought food for children. Staff got none.
- 5.17 Germans sending Jews East for liquidation. Did not know what happened to them. Misha met Korczak's sister at Umschlagplatz.
- 5.23 Misha can go from Ghetto to work on the Aryan side. Polish railroad workers told what had happened. Transported 6,000 Jews at a time to Treblinka. Twice a day.
- 5.27 Misha talked with children about choice to stay and die or try to escape. He was followed by Germans on the Aryan side.
- 5.33 Bought a railroad ticket to Lwow, went there to work as a construction worker.

Begins life without Korczak.

- 5.34 Misha feels more at home in the Ukrainian side of Poland, survived better than, easier to speak Ukrainian than Polish, Then on to Kiev as a bricklayer, all under German occupation.
- 5.35 Joins Red Army near Kiev, fought with them against Germans. 1944, joins First Polish Army, part of the Soviet Army. Becomes officer, fights all the way to the Elbe and Berlin. Survived occupation.
- 5.39 Tells of Cherniakov and the Jewish police in ghetto.
- 5.42 Jewish collaborators with Nazis in ghetto privileged class. Resistance movement. Jewish police served Germans.
- 5.46 Korczak reputation after war. Former staff organized committee to preserve memory, Misha joined. Produced publications of Korczak's writings. Staff worked on. Misha headed Korczak committee in 1960s. Manipulated by the Polish government.
- 5.49 Then Polish government removed his books from libraries. Misha to Sweden in 1979 to work at orphanages.
- 5.51 Attends Korczak conference in Paris, interviewed by Pish radio. UNESCO honors Korczak. Not celebrated in Poland until after end of communism. Anti-Semitic feelings.
- 5.54 Spread of Korczak's ideas though Europe, Japan. Misha says Korczak's books and ideas will survive. How to love a child.

Prepared by William Harwood  
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