

RG-50.120 #0168  
MORDECHAI WEISS

- 1.01 Mordechai Weiss born 1926 in a small town - Balashayanuk in Hungary, north of Budapest on Slovak border. Mother was town native, a few generations; father from Transylvania, now Romania. Father had grocery store. Father was considered an 'angel' - generous giving and kind. Lost his store by giving to charity, became a 'shochet'. 3 sisters, 2 brothers. 2 sisters live now in Israel, survived the war. One sister died before the war and the brother died in the holocaust.

Town had a large synagogue, a \_\_\_\_\_ kitchen school [?], yeshiva and other Jewish institutions. 500 Jewish families in town of 15,000. Most Jews were in commerce. Antisemitism already raging - learned to live with it. Til the war Mordechai only went to Jewish schools and learned Torah, Talmud, etc. No trade or general education. From age 12 Jewish kids were conscripted to Hungarian para-military groups, mostly clearing roads, work in fields, etc. When war broke out, 1939, Mordechai was 13.

- 1.17 Family was not Zionist. News from the Ukraine started to come in 1940. Felt helpless but accepted their fate. Orthodox Jews relied on their faith - took no steps to flee. Believed in God's will/order and plans. Explains it as Orthodox Jews' reaction to the Holocaust.
- 1.26 March 1943 Germans entered Hungary. Immediately changes - yellow stars, daily restrictions, then creation of a ghetto. All Jewish businesses confiscated, as well as homes.
- 1.32 April 1943 - young Jews were sent to labor camps. Last time he was his mother. Describes emotional separation. Later older Jews [men only] joined them - father came to camp after being forced to shave his beard but returned home after a few days through intervention of the rabbi. Ghetto was emptied of residents, but M didn't know their fate til much later.
- 1.41 Labor camp was near an air base - built air strip for the German Wehrmacht. Conditions were bearable even managed kosher food through an enterprising fellow Jew. On Rosh Hashanah were even given prayer books from deserted synagogue and on Yom Kippur were given the day off to worship all day in the forest. As Soviet army was advancing, they were moved closer to-Budapest as Germans started retreating. M saw abandoned Jewish homes in Budapest whose inhabitants were taken away.
- 1.52 Allies dropped leaflets reporting extermination of Jews in Poland and Eastern Europe along with their air raids.
- 1.56 Nobody knew who to believe, Allies' info or Germans. Even remaining Jews in Budapest didn't know. German propaganda was given to cover up any reported atrocities. Jews before extermination were forced to send postcards telling about their 'summer camps' and resorts..
- 2.00 Dec. 1944 - were taken on trains to Austrian border and conditions worsened drastically. Another labor camp - digging anti-tank tunnels - hunger, hard labor, frost,

lice and constant beatings. Many expired. Were forced to witness executions. Managed to hid pieces of lard and use it to light Hanukkah candles. Kept Shabbat - preserved whole loaf of bread for kiddush. Everyday consecrated a few minutes to learn orally a chapter of Talmud or Mishna or Torah.

- 2.18 M sold his rationed food and collected a large sum of money - bought a couple of pounds of flour and planned baking matzoh for Passover, using melted snow as water. Used the central heating furnace in the SS camp to bake their matzoh. Just before the seder night - were taken and marched away. Many were shot on the way, saw many women and children from Hungary. Survivors had to bury the dead.
- 2.34 Taken on trains to Mauthausen, traveling through Vienna. Many committed suicide on the electric fences. Allied bombs also killed many in the camp.
- 2.38 Tells of an incident when during a new transport, a Jew managed to bring a Torah book into the barrack - actually a giant tent which 'housed' thousands of Jews - the effect and excitement of the Torah presence on the prisoners, orthodox and non-practicing alike. Jacob Gotlieb was the name of the man whose brother the Torah book. He survived the war and presently lives in Israel. Tells of an assimilated Jew who was so moved, became 'born again' at the sight of the display of faith and its strength.
- 2.50 Death march from Mauthausen. M was carrying his ailing father the entire way. Gunskirchen, new barracks were built. Calls to 'Appels', again thousands perished. Cases of cannibalism were witnessed.
- 3.01 May 1945 - liberation. Walked to train station in Gunskirchen. American army tended to prisoners. Father was hospitalized. The rest were quarantined for fear of diseases, etc. Later returned home to Slovakia. Met the two surviving sisters. Heard the stories of Auschwitz. In his home town all Jewish buildings were destroyed - under Soviet rule.
- 3.15 Went to Budapest -there started preparation for immigration to Palestine, with help of the religious Zionist movement Bnai Akivah. Through Italy. Had forged papers as residents of Palestine caught in the war. Illegal immigrants - Black Sabbath - sent by british to Atlit - escaped and went to Jerusalem. Describes first weeks and months in Palestine under British. Father and sisters joined him in Palestine. Served in Israeli army.
- 3.30 Interviewer tells M of other survivors' stories of the Holocaust and their accusations of many rabbis and religious Jewish leaders of culpability - of causing many to perish by hiding the truth, discouraging resistance and accepting their fate.
- 3.35 M only holds the Germans responsible. Laments Jewish-Israeli rejection of their faith in the present. Believes in the eternity of Am Israel - the people of Israel only through true Kiddush Hashem -Jewish martyrdom. Modern assimilated and even secular Jews are doomed, in his opinion, just like the European assimilated Jewry.

- 3.46 M tells his children and grandchildren his Holocaust survival stories - parallel to the story of Exodus from Egypt. Faith and religion are his weapons to find means of survival.