

RG-50.120\*0169

KALMAN WEXLER

Start tape 1/2

1:00 to 1:20

### **Background**

He was born in Jan 1920 in Lodz. Father was textile dealer and mother worked later as seamstress, when their income dwindled.. Older brother and younger sister. Describes his Jewish environment; his schools, Yiddish elementary and Polish gymnasium where Hebrew was an elective subject. Grew up affiliated and involved with the Bund movement, as his parents, but describes the other (Zionist, religious, communists) parties and conflicts among them as well.

1:27 to

### **Pre-War Period**

Elaborates on ideological affiliations, clashes between different groups; awareness of anti-Semitism, anti-Jewish laws and demonstrations. Apprenticed as bookkeeper after graduation.

1:39 to 2:10

### **War Outbreak, Walking to Warsaw and back**

Describes the period around Sept. 1, Polish government recruiting all except Jews; On Sept 5 were warned about approaching Germans and Lodz' entire Jewish population embarked on a four-day trek to Warsaw while bombarded by Germans. Describes their time in Warsaw, minimal food, bombardment, digging trenches.

When Russians approached from the east they started walking back, encountered Germans. Helped by peasants.

2:11 to 2:30

### **Lodz under Germans**

Describes difficult life under Germans, little food or money, armbands, curfew, Single school, forced labor. Two families came to live in their home.

(Q)When the Germans entered, they rounded up all Jewish and gentile intelligentsia and

Executed them near Radogosh factory. Town leadership escaped or hid.

2:48 – before the ghetto, all synagogues were bombarded.

2:30 to 2:55

### **Lodz Ghetto**

Was created in the poorest area of town, Poles who lived there were expelled. They got a one-room apartment. Describes their routine. Ghetto was "hermetically" closed on May 1st. Committees, money exchanges, internal police.

2:56 to 3:11

### **Everyday life in Ghetto**

Describes organizations in Ghetto. Rumkowski, the head of the Jewish community, organized the internal police and needed high school graduates, (to which his father objected), but also as teachers for elementary- and high schools where Yiddish, Hebrew, German and Polish were taught. Describes his work as a Yiddish teacher, the books and buildings. Taught about one year.

3:11 to 3:20

### **School Building Used for New Transports**

In early '42 new transports of Jews from Berlin, Vienna and Prague replaced the children (who were mostly dispersed or shipped off to extermination camps.

[3:30 Marishin (?) The children were collected in carts and sent to Chelmno.]

Describes his contact with the newcomers, especially family from Prague, who were not yet as impoverished and unaware of their fate.

3:19 to 3:33

### **More about Daily Life in Ghetto**

Taught about one year. Describes the terrible hunger, the cold. People worked in order to get food coupon. At the same time they still socialized ; had meetings; youth movement activities (Rumkowski organized training camps - 'Hachshara' - for them); exchanged news. After schools' closing he worked in bookkeeping.

3::34

**Hospitals' liquidation** by Germans, and patients thrown out. His state of mind during this period ('42). The 'Gesperre', isolation of ghetto, death everywhere.

3:45

**Rumkowski** (?), different opinions about him, politics

3:49

**Central Accounting** of the ghetto and his work there.

3:52 to 4:00 (end Tape 1/2)

### **Hidden Radios**

Describes how they built and listened to different radios in hiding, BBC news

4:00 (start tape 2/2) to 4:37

### **Radio Listening**

Further details of programs and news heard over these radios (e.g. June '44 invasion); how radios were hidden and family members arrested by Germans while searching.

4:38 to

### **Liquidation of the Ghetto**

Describes how streets were closed off; final 600 people gather at 36 Khmelnitsky street. Left for factory. ( July '44) Continued listening to radio. Story of Hershkowitz family in hiding.

4:54 to 5:00

Polish Revolt Aug.1 ( but they were not yet liberated because of conflicts between Poles and Russians). Finally, they were liberated by the Russians' quick attack in January '45.

Lodz ghetto was the last one to be liberated..

5:02

Describes the last days in the ghetto. On October 22 ('44) they were sent in railroad cars via Radogosh station, to Oranienburg camp and then to Sachsenhausen. Women were sent to Ravensbruck.

5:04 to 5:13

#### **Vidavsky's (?) suicide and others fate**

Describes how Vidavsky's friends provided him with poison so the Germans won't get his secrets. His remains were later brought to Israel according to his wishes. Grossman the photographer died during the Sachsenhausen march

5:15 to. 5:29

#### **The final (labor?) camp**

Continues to describe their life in this camp, a Jewish group among other types of prisoners; the Germans 'made busy' although there was no work; conditions relatively better; building fortifications when Russians approached. Finally liberated by the

Russians.

5:30 to 5:32

#### **Meeting Russian Jewish Officers .Passover Seder with them**

5:34 to 5:42

## **Final Escape and return to Lodz**

Describes their escape toward Polish border and reaching Lodz where he met his (eventual) wife again.. Describes the town and the reorganization of the Bund movement, young Jews registering for university. Still, in 1948 both left for Israel (anti-Semitic outbursts and the war of independence influenced this decision).

5:42 to 5:55 (end tape 2/2)

## **First Years in Israel and Some Evaluation**

Describes the very difficult first years in Israel. Has not become an ardent Zionist but will not leave the country.

Has not told his children about his holocaust experience until very recently. The same is true for most of his contemporaries .

Today believes Rumkowski ( who died in Auschwitz) accomplished many valuable things while he was in Lodz. E.g., he upheld the principle of holding on as long as possible, and Lodz ghetto had the largest number of survivors. Tells the fate of the radios and their importance,

Abstracted and translated by Hava Bonne'

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