

RG – 50.120*0178

Zeliger, Hedva

Tape I

01:00 to 01:12

Background She was born in Marienbad, Czechoslovakia, but her family moved to Przemysl when she was young. Her father was an agronomist, and an expert on wood for violins. Her parents spent half of each year in the Carpathian Mountains cultivating trees, while she stayed with her grandmother until she finished high school. They later moved to Kolomyia, where anti-Semitism, especially by the Endeks, prompted her to leave agronomy studies and specialize in nursing.

01:13 to 01:27

War Outbreak She describes Jewish life until 1939, and her first encounter with German police. The Soviets did not mind Jews as such, but only the 'bourgeoisie' whom they sent to Russia, including some of her relatives who perished there. (She had married a wealthy businessman in 1939. He was loved by his employees). Describes her work as nursing director in hospital.

01:28 to 01:48

Actions and Ghettos; She establishes an Orphanage Describes how the Germans started a series of 'Aktionen', from poorer to less poor areas of town; how she found the children whom she took under her care (she ended up with 180 children); how she obtained help from some Jewish organizations and doctors, other professionals and the Jewish police. Her husband was still working with Jews who were hiding in his factory and with a helpful German manager– Beckman. The Aktionen continued in different areas of town, and many people were killed. Three Ghettos were established. They lived in the third ghetto, Judenrat was in the first ghetto, and her mother lived in the second ghetto. The children lived in two cottages. Gestapo permission was required to cross among them. From the original 18,000 plus Jews only a few thousands were left in Kolomyia.

01:49 to 02:30

The 'Selektion' and Killing of her Orphanage Children She describes how the Gestapo bombarded and searched houses in Ghetto #3, including the orphanage. She tried to hide children in cellars and attics and urged older ones to escape (lists how many

were taken and where). Germans bombarded people in the courtyard threw people into trucks, pushed all those left into Ghetto #1 and liquidated the other two. Also took all their suitcases. She and her husband were among the 100 who were needed and enabled to stay (helped by a Polish landlady and Beckman). Her parents were sent away and perished. When she returned to the orphanage building, where infants and sick children were left, she found all 40 children shot/slaughtered to death.

02:32 to 03:00 **Life in the Ghetto** She describes daily life in the Ghetto, where most people were refugees from neighboring places. There was a terrible hunger and daily collection of corpses on carts, which were then thrown into common grave. She cares for 30 children, with some help and food from Poles and the Jewish Police. Some Jews actually betrayed Ghetto people. Horowitz, (of the Jewish Police?) was notorious among them. He would disclose hiding Jews, as well as steal property and jewelry, all to placate the Germans. The Judenrat had a limited role. Describes hiding in attic and watching Germans smoke out and shoot people.

03:02 to 03:06 **Shock after finding killed children at orphanage** Describes her several days of numbness, almost taking poison (which she kept sewn into her dress collar).

03:07 to 03:22 **Wedding and Early Relation with Russians** Returns to earlier period to describes her January 1939 very secular wedding (with first husband) under Soviet rule, during which mostly the 'bourgeoisie' were deported (including some relatives) to Russia. "Life was almost normal until the Germans came"

03:24 to 03:27 **Unable to Revolt against Germans and Why**

03:28 to 04:00 **Escape to Budapest** Beckman (her husband's manager) urged and helped them to escape, including providing documents. She describes 100 Km march to border, through Carpathian Mountains; train; terrible weather. They finally reached Hungarian Gestapo, had various encounters, some assistance. Were placed in prison in Stanislawow (Ivano-Frankivsk). She describes the cell conditions; the Jews who betrayed, cell inmates, Romanian-Ukrainian guards.

Tape II

04:03 to 04:48 **Prison** Describes her experiences in the Stanislawow prison, Her cellmates were mostly non-Jewish and 'political' like her. Her guards were mostly Volksdeutsche. Andreas was the worst, but another one was helpful. Jewish doctor-prisoner Dr. Lieber (a man) had her help him in the clinic as a nurse, but he was deported

himself later. Describes daily routines, food, prison director taking all their possessions.

4:30

On December 24 1942 she saw truck loads of Jews brought into prison, their sick and dead taken to **Soporotcheck** woods.

04:49 to 05:01

Transfer to Lvov She describes it there - as one of 20 'politicals' with 3,000 criminals from prison - sudden transfer to the Lvov Jewish Lager, where they encountered thousands of Jews and gypsies from surrounding areas after the closing of the Lvov Ghetto. She tells about three days of terrible living there in large blocks with Gestapo whipping them all.

05:02 to 05: 13

'Selektion' and Transfer to Lublin Describes the 'Selektion' and the transfer on foot and by train to Lublin Station. The Gestapo shot all who jumped or fell. (Husband was in same prison and was transferred also).

05:14 to 05:59

Majdanek Describes her arrival at Majdanek on March 10, 1943. (Their transport was only the second one there, since it served only POW's during its first year - "Paviak - political Poles). She describes the disinfection procedure, washing, receiving the Majdanek uniforms, taking away their remaining belongings, distribution to barracks and what these looked like inside. She describes in detail their female guard ('Brigitta') and her cruelty. Describes their daily routine, her assignment as translator ('Dolmetscher') and tells who some of the other women inmates were. No one knew she was Jewish throughout these experiences. Continues descriptions of food, meals, fieldwork, 'Appell' (roll call) in the camp. More details of the cruelty of the guard Brigida.

06:25 to 06:55

Contact with Others Her work as translator ('Dolmetscher') enabled her to visit other blocks and groups of prisoners. She and other inmates worked with the prisoners' card-file index and had access to name lists which they could occasionally manipulate, but it was necessary to watch out for informers. Kogod and Brigitta were evil, but there were also good guards.

06:56 to 07:08

Transport from Warsaw 10,000 Jews arrived from Warsaw (they told about the Ghetto). More Selektion, of women and children joined their block, and then loaded on trucks, gassed and burned in a nearby field. She saw all these atrocities, and adds the following ones too: A child she fed was killed in her arms and she was wounded.

Tape III

- 07:08** Describes what happened to Jewish women.
- 07:20** Describes what happened to Polish prostitutes, Greek women from Auschwitz.
- 07:25** Describes what happened during the medical experiments in special building.
- 07:30** Describes what happened to Brigitta and Andreas hanging a Jewish woman.
- 07:40** Describes how she saved an inmate by mistranslating her note.
- 07:45 to 07:55** **Freed from Majdanek** She describes how two strange officers asked her to work for them. She refused saying she didn't like Germans upon which they told her she and her husband will be free to leave Majdanek. She explains this as being the result of her audacity in refusing their request.
- 07:56 to 08:20** **Leaving for Lvov** She, husband (separately), and a few others (all "politicals – no Jews) were directed to Gestapo in Lvov. They were helped by some organizations, also with papers. She arranged for job as Gestapo would sent all young women to work in Germany. They feared of being recognized, so eventually moved to Lublin. Describes where they lived and what they did there.
- 0822: to 08:53** **Story of Being Freed from Majdanek** (Repeated in greater detail.)
- 08:54 to 09:45** **Move to Lublin** Describes how her husband (known until then only as her 'cousin') was freed separately, how they established contact, and both settled in Lublin. Both worked initially in a meat factory, established contacts with partisans and others; received some help from Polish organizations; bartered goods. Describes good and bad Germans and Poles; another job and its connections/routines. Describes what they heard was happening in Majdanek (November 3 Aktions when 18000 Jews were liquidated), her contacts with Miesch (the helpful German Wehrmacht soldier) and her old 'Political' campmates.
- 09:46 to 10:10** **Battles in Lublin** Describes bombardment of Lublin. The behavior of the occupying Russians. She starts working as a journalist. Finds a relative.

Tape IV

- 10:12 to 10:31** **Majdanek after the Germans' Escape** Only 200 women were left. Trials beginning. Writes about Majdanek and what was found there.
- 10:32 to 10:53** **Moves to Lodz and Elsewhere** They spent six months in Lodz and she worked as a reporter. Tells what happened to Jews in many countries after the war. They subsequently moved to Herschberg, and **Yelena Gura** in Silesia, Her son was born there. Describes life and work. Jews returned there, mostly from Russia.
- 10:56 to 11:05** **Searching for and finding relatives**
- 11:05 to 11:32** **Leaving Poland for Israel** In March 1950 they left Poland because of anti-Semitism, for Israel. Describes the restrictions imposed on their departure, and difficult travel conditions (including demeaning attitude of some Jews). Describes travel via Italy, arrival in immigrant absorption center and quarantine, and finally settling in Kfar Saba.
- 11:32 to 11:58** **What Happened to Majdanek Personnel (In response to interviewer's questions)?**
- 1) **Ravina Braunsteiner 'Kobiula'**: Saw her beating but not killing others
- 2) **Brigitta**: she testified at her Dusseldorf trial, describes her extreme cruelty.
- 3) **Elli Ru'ovsky**:
- 11:58 to 12:00** **Her hardest experience** Was she saw at Stanislawow prison.
- The hardest personal experience** She had when her orphanage children were slaughtered.
- 12:09 to 12:12** **Her Grandparents' End** A (Jewish) informer betrayed them one day before the end of the war, and all were killed. She has a cassette recording from the trials, also a film, which she gave to Yad Vashem. She has also written and published a book about her Holocaust experiences.

Translated and summarized by Hava Bonne'

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