

RG-50.120*181 4 Tapes
ZIONTZ, PINCHAS

Tape I

- 1.01.04 Pinchas was born in September, 1930, in a shtetl named baranow, by the river Vleps. It was located about 55 km north of Lublin, and near a bigger city called Pulavi.
- 02.23 Pinchas estimates that most of the population of his shtetl - around 5,000-7,000 - were Jews. The Jews were very observant. In the year 1938, Pinchas' house was consumed by the fire that raged in the city. It was rebuilt with bricks, as opposed to all other houses made of wood. His house still stands.
- 03.00 Pinchas went to cheder at the age of 3. He walked alone the short distance from his house, in the dark, with a flash light. By 5, he had finished learning the Torah. Pinchas distinguished himself as a student. His reward was to sit next to the rebbe. He learned to chant the Torah, too. His teacher prophesized he would be one of the great rabbis of Israel [the Jewish people].
- 05.07 Pinchas' father affiliated with the Communist Party. He was completely secular, but didn't hesitate to send his son to the cheder. Later on, Pinchas attended also the local public school. His father thought it a good idea to learn the Russian language. As a matter of fact, his father encouraged all kinds of study, and Pinchas has never stopped learning.
- 06.47 The principal of the public school was an open anti-semitic, as were the Polish children. They would run after the Jewish students after school, many times with knives. Pinchas was in second grade in 1938.
- 07.29 Pinchas' father was a tailor, loved and accepted in the shtetl because of his political ideas.
- 08.38 In 19138, Pinchas' father was in jail. He recalls bringing food to him with his mother, and passing it through a small, barred window.
- 09.07 Pinchas' family lived in the shtetl's main street. Very few Poles lived there, and those who did were bitter anit-semites.
- 09.45 Pinchas' parents were distant cousins. Father was born in 1900; mother in 1907. Pinchas had a very large extended family.

- 10.40 Pinchas' great grandfather was close to 100 years old when the nazis killed him.
- 12.00 There were Jewish yhouth, Zionist organizations there.
- 12.57 Great poverty.
- 13.47 In 1939, after the germans entered the shtetl. Pinchas did not return to school. He had finished second grade. He did not go back to school until after the war. He had been an excellent student in public school too.
- 15.42 Pinchas had a younger brother, in 1932.
- 17.00 Remembering his parents. Mother had a younger brother in Warsaw.
- 23.12 In 1938, Pinchas saw a plane for the very first time. While distracted by it, he was run over by a wagon and horse. He wasn't seriously injured.
- 25.00 Pinchas had a rich imagination. Examples.
- 26.00 His childhood was uneventful. Because of his aptitude in his studies, the Polish children would come to him for help; they also protected him from the treatment given to the other Jewish children.
- 27.00 Description of the shtetl.
- 28.12 Yiddish was spoken at home, but the family knew, of course, Polish.
- 29.34 Father's name was Shlomo; mother's, Ita Leah.
- 30.01 In 1936-1937, 2 maternal aunts also lived with the family. Only one survived.
- 30.49 Pinchas' maternal grandparents died young, of illnesses.
- 31.16 There were 6 people in Pinchas' household: he and his brother, the parents and the 2 aunts.
- 32.00 Pinchas' extended family.

- 37.00 At the outbreak of the war, in Sept. 1939, the family loaded a few possessions onto a wagon and moved to a village nearby. They lived with a Polish family. A rabbi also had taken refuge there. He had been a tenant at Pinchas' home. He was young and came from Cracow. The Germans bombed the long caravan of refugees. Pinchas' family wasn't hit. They returned home after 2 weeks. During those 2 weeks, Pinchas' father and the young rabbi had decided to flee to Russia - in search of security - establish themselves, and then bring the family. Father believed in communism.
- 42.00 Pinchas could not make peace with the idea of losing his father, his central figure, and succeeded in upsetting the father's plans.
- 47.47 Until January 1940, the Germans coexisted in peace with the town's Jews.
- 49.00 The first anti-Jewish edicts appeared written in posters: prohibition to Jewish children to attend school, prohibition to listen to the radio, etc. The surprising thing was that all the announcements carried a death threat if the bans were not followed. Soon after, the bans were more and more severe.
- 51.00 At the end of 1939, the Nazis would kidnap members of the Jewish 'intelligentsia' and either kill them, or demand ransom for their return. The Poles helped the Germans.
- 57.30 Judenrat: its work.
- 2.03.00 First encounter with German soldiers, who break the door down and, while pointing a gun to Pinchas' mother's head, demanded bread and eggs.
- 05.52 A ghetto is established. In the summer of 1941, the Jews - who lived in better housing - are transferred to the Poles' poorer housing, the Jewish homes are given to the Poles. It became impossible to make a living. Under cover of night, Jews leave the ghetto to exchange their valuable objects for food. Many are caught, some through informants.
- 21.00 Gratuitous cruelty of the Germans. Examples.
- 32.10 In 1942, the youth had disappeared, either sent away, kidnapped or killed. Many of the rest: old people, women and children, were dying of sickness or hunger. The population diminished, perhaps to

- half of what it was.
- 34.00 Children don't get together to play any more.
- 41.00 Pinchas' nuclear family survives intact. When ordered to move to the poor houses of the Poles, Pinchas' father finds a friendly Polish family to live in their house.
- 45.00 Pinchas passed the idle time reading the books of his father's library, located in the attic. He read all the masters of Yiddish literature, Torah and other sacred books, and also books in Polish.
- 45.48 Anti-semitism of the Poles grows. Pinchas asks why, the father cannot answer. Parents stop being a refuge to the questioning child.
- 51.00 All about buttons, and playing with his big brother.
- 54.36 1942, May 8. Deportation from the ghetto to another shtetl 12-14 km away. There was a train station there. Father found out about the deportation 2 days before it happened. He alerted his family, but no one believed him, except for his nuclear family.
- 3.19.00 Pinchas' father finds a Pole, 2-3 km from the house, who is willing to hide them. On the night of May 7th, the pole sends a wagon for the family, to pick them up, with their bundles.
- 21.22 Arrival to that farm, south-west from Boronov. They are all put in the high area of a barn.
- 23.00 The next day, the deportees passed by the farm in which Pinchas' family was hiding.
- 34.46 The deportation, according to witnesses who told of it to Pinchas' family later on: 10 German soldiers come to the ghetto and manage to deport the thousands left!
- 37.18 The Germans organized the Polish farmers to encircle the ghetto with their wagons, by promising them the wealth of the Jews.
- 38.26 The Jews are transported to Pulavi. There, the Jews are put on trains, and sent to their deaths.
- 47.26 After a week of hiding, the Polish farmer tells Pinchas' family that

they have to go, as it had become too dangerous to conceal 6 people . The family leaves, without a destination. They hide in a nearby forest.

53.00 Pinchas' father manages daily to obtain food from a nearby farm.

58.16 They were in the forest until June, 1942.

Tape II

4.09.10 Arrival in Kamionka, to the home of another maternal aunt.
They are settled in an attic.

10.17 Heavy price extracted from people offering refuge.

11.01 Hiding from informants.

13.45 The uncle managed to register them as residents. The father managed to rent a room, the Polish friend returned to him sewing machine he had deposited before fleeing, and the father started to get some income from tailoring.

15.16 Encounter with Jews from Czechoslovakia. The 2 populations were separate, no solidarity existed. The Czechs were the first to be sent to work by the Judenrat. They were very poor.

16.39 They were there until October of that year, when rumors began spreading about the impending deportation of that ghetto.

19.50 Pinchas' father and other relatives and 'landsmen' began organizing for an eventual escape, perhaps to the other side of the original shtetl, to Konskowola

21.46 The escape in the direction of Baranov.

26.31 Arrival in Konskowola, after a couple of very difficult days of walking without food. There was a ghetto in Konskowola, and the family found refuge there.

33.00 Escape from that ghetto when they received the information that the Jews there were going to be deported the next day. Escape through water, on father's shoulders.

35.18 Return to Baranov, after 5 months away. They hid in the forest there, next to Pogonow. From that point on, Oct. '42, Pinchas doesn't

- leave the forest until the end of the war.
- 37.38 Description of the forest; how they obtained food, despite the danger. Respite comes for a while when a former trainee of Pinchas' father in his tailor shop, finds him and brings the entire family into hiding in his Polish house, in exchange of sewing for his family. This one Pole recommends the tailor to others, and so the family moves from one Polish home to the next. They don't stay over a week in each Polish home, and many times the father is the only one allowed inside: the rest of the family has to stay in the forest, but they receive food. It was a difficult time, the winter of 1942.
- 5.03.46 A few hundred Jews from Baranov were hiding in the same forest.
- 10.00 The Polish police was actively hunting the Jews hiding in the forest. Therefore, the number of Jews in hiding diminished noticeably.
- 19.00 Jan. 1945 - Father manages to 'buy' a hiding place in the straw storage of a Polish farmer. The family is there Jan. and Feb.
- 21.45 The family finds out there are partisans in the area.
- 34.35 Some of the partisans are fascist - antisemites, belonging to A.K. They pursue the hiding Jews and liquidate those Poles who help the Jews. The good Poles are scared. They decide that the Zientz family has to be killed, fearing that the children in the family [under torture] will inform on the helping Poles. No one is found to carry out the killing. A plot is concocted to have a butcher from the other side of the river kill the family. By a miracle, the family discovers they plot, and they are saved. More miraculous stories - life in the forest is very difficult; the family is always hungry.
- 6.10.00 Pinchas goes around asking for food. He is helped by the fact he is white-blond, and doesn't look Jewish.
- 13.37 Pinchas' father communicates with the PPR partisans [where many Soviet prisoners are active]. The horrible story of the partisans that ambush the Jewish partisans in order to steal their weapons, is told by a 'landsman' of Pinchas. [Vishinsky is the traitor.]
- 38.43 Pinchas' father knows he cannot count on the partisans.... another winter approaches.

- 41.41 In Jan. 1944 news get to Jews about Maydanek, but not as a death camp but as a work camp.
- 46.46 That winter 43-44 was one of the coldest ones in European history.
- 47.19 Father decides on the strategy for the upcoming winter: to build a bunker in the forest and hid there.
- 52.37 The building of the bunker.
- 55.56 Hygiene and clothing; lice and disease.
- 58.51 Choice of site for the bunker near, but not too much so, to Pogonov.

Tape III

- 7.05.39 When Pinchas - who doesn't look Jewish - is sent to collect food from the villagers, he does so under the guise of an orphan, whose parents were killed in Lodz, in one of the early bombardments. One time, the farmers he visits offer to adopt him, and he agrees after consultation with his parents. He worked as a shepherd of their 3 cows.
- 09.32 The arrangement lasted for 5 happy weeks, when he was identified as a Jew. He fled, but with the discovery the search for food as an 'orphan' also came to an end.
- 16.30 New ties are tied between Pinchas' fathers and the partisans of the PPR. By then, most of the Poles in Pogonov realized that the Zientz family was not liquidated by the appointed butcher, and, on the contrary, their importance was increased because they were spotted with weapons.
- 19.01 In order to build the bunker they had to steal tools [shovel, axe] which they did at night. The building of the bunker.
- 30.00 Life in the bunker. Organization in case of danger.
- 37.42 Visitors begin calling in the family, at the bunker. Many decide to build bunkers like it. Pinchas' father decides to build a smaller bunker, 70 m. away. He gets started before the winter.
- 40.00 They stash food for the winter, in order not to have to procure after the snow begins to fall, in which case there would be the danger of

footprints. The main food was potatoes, which needed to be stolen from the local farmers but in a way that the latter won't find out. Strategies.

- 46.27 Hunger in the bunker; lice; foruncles were prevalent and everyone suffered from them.
- 49.12 This was January 1944. A tough winter.
- 50.00 On the days of snow storms, Pinchas and his father would venture out, to steal some food, as the continuously falling snow would erase their footprints.
- 55.23 Feb. 10. A beautiful day. The family decides to cook some potatoes, but they didn't have wood for the fire. Father took his axe, a couple of bags, and his children also, to gather dry wood sticks. They favored birch [of which there were few trees in the forest] because the white cover of the trunk is very flammable. Encounter with 2 armed Germans, who begin to shoot at them. They flee in different directions. Pinchas runs in the opposite direction from the Germans, and doesn't stop running until evening. When he decides to go back to the bunker, his progress is slow due to the depth of the snow. Also, each step breaks the icy snow, loudly, and he fears to be found. Encounter with his little brother, who tells him that the Germans interrogated the father, and let him go.
- 8.03.00 They find the way back to the bunker, where they arrive by midnight.
- 06.15 Despair sets in after 3 days, when he did not return.
- 08.00 Pinchas and his aunt go after the footprints of ghetto Germans and the father. They take them to a road, where the footprints disappear, but they realized that across the road there is a German air field, and many Germans are camped there. Pinchas and his aunt realize that most probably the father was taken there but they decide not to tell the family the truth.
- 11.31 Another journey is undertaken in search of the father. The hunger was prevalent, as was the despair. It was clear to all that without the father, the family will not survive.
- 13.57 Pinchas and his aunt go looking for other bunkers of Jews who were hiding in a Polish farm, with a righteous family. They had 2 missions :

to find the father there, perhaps, and to find out if they could move in with them. The families in hiding.

- 24.10 Upon arrival into the hiding, they found a scene of destruction. The hide-out had been discovered at night. Half the people escaped, half were killed out of the more than 20! Pinchas finds out from a Polish acquaintance, the fate of his father. He was moved from place to place, interrogated and punished harshly. From the stories, Pinchas assumed his father was now dead; his last station was the gestapo in Lublin. The fate of each one of the hidden Jews.
- 39.38 Pinchas and his aunt return to bunker, through the road and not through the heavy snow. They escape death at the hands of the fascist Pole partisans, return to the bunker, and do not give any of the information gathered in the journey to their awaiting family. The aunt suggests to move over to the smaller bunk that Pinchas' father had prepared.
- 46.15 In the meantime, on or around Feb. 22, they receive the surprise visit of Yehuda Bur, an old friend from the shtetl, and one of the survivors of the bunkers. Yehuda Bur came with a sack of potatoes. They request refuge in the bunker.
- 48.08 In honor of the arrival and the food, the family decided to make latkes. They try to flee but all are caught except for Pinchas. He doesn't see much sense in surviving. Then, when the Ukrainians leave, he finds the Polish villagers, who had come to the forest to see what happened. They discover Pinchas, who was limping because he had been shot, but don't offer help. They take him to the places of the dead and mutilated bodies of his mother, younger brother and older aunt. The youngest aunt, and the friends who had come to visit, were unaccounted for. The Poles also tell Pinchas how his father died: after being tortured by the gestapo, he was brought to his own secondary bunker: a grenade was thrown in, and the structure burned with the agonizing father inside.
- 9.00.00 Pinchas makes his way back to the forest where he hid with his family. He remembers that his father said that in case of utmost danger he can ask help from the Polish woman baker; he finds his young aunt there too. The husband of the baker refuses them refuge, and they start wandering again. They find Yehuda Bury's brother, who also refuses to help. Then, they find out the hideout of the Zelig brothers, and lo and behold, Yehuda Bury is hiding there with his son. He had survived the slaughter! But, they all refuse to

shelter Pinchas and his aunt.

TAPE iV

- 10.03.48 One of the 8 there decide that Pinchas, who was hurt, can stay. Pinchas was taken to a doctor to remove the bullet from his leg. He prescribes a treatment too, which included lying flat. He had to lie down on top of the 8 residents, who were sitting bending in two, for lack of space.
- 13.14 Syating there until beginning of April. The group starts planning a 'summer bunker'. The bunker is finished by May 1, but they don't want to take Pinchas, the wounded one. When they remove the bandages, they find that the wounds have healed, but the boy cannot walk. -----night, they stand Pinchas up, and teach him to walk again. He cannot take more than 10 steps without falling - this, after 8-10 nights, so it will be impossible for Pinchas the walk the necessary distance to the new bunker. They decide to walk each one at his own pace, while Pinchas and the aunt drag themselves last. They succeed. There are 11 people in the bunker now. It is May, and the puddles freeze at night. Much mud and rains.
- 10.33 A scare, when germans come into the forest to search for partisans, prompts the idea of digging a new bunker in one of the neighboring fields. A Polish fasrmer will undertake the digging, and then sow over the surface to hide the bunker.
- 37.56 When the bunker is ready, everyone moves to it without letting Pinchas and his aunt know. Whoever tells them, will not be allowed in the new bunker.
- 41.08 The aunt now obtaining food at night time, and while she is gone Pinchas comes out of hiding and tries to teach himself to walk again, with the aid of two brunches - used as crutches.
- 42.19 In June a visitor bey the name of Altschuler comes to visit, and invites them to join him in a safer place. The reunion there with the former bunker - mates. Armed partisans come to visit often. The land is swampy and hidden between trees of wide leaves. No need to dig a bunker. Deluge poses danger of freezing in the cold or sinking in the mud. Altschuler protects them. The others flee to safer places.
- 52.38 Stories of local Poles who help them: Cheslaw, and others.

54.00 Rumors of approaching front, and of the Germans losing ground.

58.17 Three times, the Germans bombed the swampy refuge. During the attack,

Jews would hide up to their heads in the swamp.

11.01.00 Beginning of summer. Health improves. Rumors say that Germans have withdrawn, and that the partisans are openly walking in the village. Egoism is prevalent among the survivors.

11.11 Reflections on surviving while wounded: why is he alive; better to die than endanger other people's lives while he is unable to walk or run. Very poignant.

16.27 Erection of a shed, as refuge from heavy rains.

19.20 July, August of that year, Pinchas can walk, albeit with a limp, and accompanies his faithful and loyal aunt in search of food. Cheslaw, the

Pole, continues being helpful to them, providing them with food. Aunt still has some of the hidden jewels of Pinchas' mother; selling them helps them survive.

21.10 The partisans walk in the open, in August. Some of the Poles are truly friendly and happy at the survival of the Jews. The majority are not, and threaten the survivors.

22.50 Pinchas is asked to become a messenger for the PPR, the Polish workers' party. On his first mission, he encounters a 'vision'. A jeep arrives with 3 soldiers dressed as Russians. They ask Pinchas the way to the bridge. Pinchas accompanies them, and they give him a present: a cigarette lighter made of an empty Russian rifle shell. Pinchas runs, hysterically, limping, tired, back to the forest to announce they have been liberated. He is exhausted: cries and laughs all at once. The partisans are convinced he lost his mind, until he shows them the lighter. A decision is made to post partisans on tree tops on the road where Pinchas had encountered the Russians. And they see an entire Russian detachment! A great happiness pervades the camp, mixed with inconsolable grief for those who did not survive to see the day. The partisans disband the next day. The Russians institute a communist administration. Pinchas and his aunt don't have

where to go. They call, again, on Cheslaw, the good Pole.

44.23 The Jews are afraid to reclaim their homes and businesses, taken over by the Poles. The Jews are disoriented. Chaos reigns. Many instances of Poles killing the Jews who came to retrieve the goods they had deposited with the Poles.

54.58 Everyone of the surviving Jews flee to Lublin. Pinchas and his aunt are still at the Cheslaws, awaiting the arrival of the aunt's friend, whom they wanted to consult about their next step.

58.56 Arrival of the aunt's friend. He participated in the liquidation of SS officers in nearby Milchow. They all decide to go to Lublin.

12.00.53 Arrival in Lublin in September 1944. Many Jews live already there, in the ruined city. They find an apartment, which they share with another couple.

03.00 Life begins to get organized for the grown-ups; however, Pinchas idles alone, the entire day in the house. After an emotional struggle, the aunt [21 years old] and Pinchas [about 14] decide he should go to the Jewish orphanage in the city. There, he will be busy, well taken care of, and continue his studies. Pinchas becomes ill, contracting all kinds of symptoms, and is sent to a Russian military hospital, where they treat him and feed him and take good care of him. He is ill for 2-3 months.

08.30 In 1963, Pinchas discovers a surviving older sister of his mother, Dina, who had married a communist Pole. They had spent time in Vina concentra-
tion camp. They lived in Warsaw.

11.59 In 1963, the government of Poland decided, in a good will gesture, to help the families of victims who know where the dear ones were killed, to find their remains, and bring them proper burial.

13.40 Arrival in Baranov, with much trepidation, and fear from retaliation by the Poles. They dress as English tourists. Pinchas identifies all the homes. They go to Pinchas' home, where he sees all his furniture and utensils

exactly

as he left them. He is immediately identified by the current residents of

the home. The housewife gives him a tablecloth from his parents' home,

as she 'didn't need it'. Pinchas realizes it is their Passover tablecloth.

He

also sees the fruit tree and the swing in the back yard. He is overwhelmed, and cannot even think of going to his next stop, Pogonov, where Kovalchik lives - the person who had shot him. He begs his aunt and her guide friend to go back to Lublin [where their journey originated]. Despite the difficulties, both physical and emotional. They persevere. Pinchas finds the remains of his father [in whose pocket he finds his pocket knife], his mother, brother and aunt. He is helped in the digging by two Poles the government assigns him. All the remains are put in one coffin, and brought to burial in the Jewish cemetery. The nightmare that had accompanied Pinchas for 19 years, suddenly disappears. As a survivor he feels privileged to have a grave over which to pray. He goes annually to Poland, accompanying a youth group, to whom he tells the story; they will be witnesses. [Very moving last hour.]