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Hochman, Zalman

One Video Cassette

In Hebrew

Abstract: Zalman Hochman was the youngest of six brothers, born in 1929 in Warsaw, Poland to a non-orthodox family. He and his brothers survived the war by living on the streets. They worked the black market in the Warsaw Ghetto and amongst German and Polish underground smuggling operations. Every day was a struggle. After the war he arrived in Palestine as a Youth Aliyah member. Many of his brothers went there and they were trained as Palmach soldiers and fought in various places during the war of independence. Zalman Hochman, “fought wars for ten years of his life, from age 10 to 20; one war after the other.”

1:00: Zalman Hochman was born in 1929 in Warsaw. He describes a quiet non-orthodox home life; father working in a leather factory and his mother was at home. He was the youngest of six brothers. From first grade on, he lived through his classmates’ teasing and hostility. Their teasing taught him about anti-Semitism and being a member of a minority group. This prompted him to speak up in their synagogue and ask for a Jewish school.

His oldest brother was conscripted into the Polish army in 1937. He describes his other brothers and their skills. Everybody became increasingly aware of events around the borders and of the Germans.

1:21: He describes the bombardment by the Germans, shrieking planes and powerful bombs. The Poles who were so self-assured before, were now easily defeated. Shelter, hunger and looting were major factors in day-to-day life. The powerful and efficient German army took over everything and organized the civilian population.

1:34: A new set of anti-Jewish Rules started immediately. Two of his brothers who looked like gentiles helped provide for their family. The Germans took the majority of all goods. There were many prohibitions and wearing the yellow star was required.

1:38: He describes how the population was reorganized and crowded into apartments. A fence was built. The food situation deteriorated. Large smuggling operations between the ghetto and the outside were organized. The ghetto residents sold everything they had to obtain just a little food from the outside. Their apartment was emptying of basic essentials and their father was becoming weaker. He describes the behavior of the Polish and the Jewish police.

- 1:54: His oldest brother, Fishel, was a POW who fled to Bialystok, then to Siberia. His second oldest brother, Isaac was sent after him and was eventually killed. Their father died in 1940. His next two brothers, Leon and Itzick, escaped to the country to forage for food from peasants. They were separated, caught, escaped from place to place and not heard from for a long time.
- 2:03: He and his next youngest brother, Peretz, moved almost daily devising ingenious ways to smuggle whatever possible to have some food for the family. Their mother was very weak.
- Zalman describes the ‘so different’ world outside the ghetto, ‘luxurious’ but lawless. He was arrested by the Polish police but escaped. He was helped by some gentiles but most were afraid of the punishment for helping Jews. He sang in the street for money.
- 2:22: He describes the first “Aktion” in 1942 when his mother was deported and killed. He was not there at the time but found out the details later. He saw buildings burned and destroyed. He and his brother escaped from the ghetto, moving from place to place, hiding in heated staircases, trash cans and under bridges. He was ‘almost caught’ many times.
- 2:33: He describes how he met Shimon, a bulky prisoner from a group of Jewish men who came out daily to work for the Germans. He describes how they helped each other and how Shimon showed him the hiding places with provisions and arms which belonged to the underground. He describes Shimon’s life in the ghetto and how he helped him.
- 2:47: Zelman describes the revolt in April 1943. He describes how it started with the rumors on Seder night, the Germans’ preparations, the Aktion, shooting German soldiers, the bombarding and burning of buildings, the final arrests and how he and so many others were led to Umschlagplatz, where they were beaten and tormented.
- 3:00: They were transferred onto trains. He followed Shimon’s instructions and escaped from the train, hanging underneath the train car. He succeeded in running away and escaped from many dangers. He eventually found his way to an assigned meeting place.
- 3:09: He describes the group of children that escaped the ghetto, where they roamed and where they found hiding places to sleep. He detailed their relationships and solidarity. They became cigarette traders. He describes how they were trained to buy and sell, where and how they practiced their trade, continuously changing of places, and being on the watch so as to not to be recognized. He describes also some ‘close calls’ with German officers. Their biggest problem was finding places to sleep after the curfew started, so they spent much time in movie theaters. On many occasions they narrowly missed being arrested. They were given

occasional help and places to sleep by kind women but even sympathetic people where afraid the Germans would kill them for hiding Jews.

- 3:34: Zelman describes the different worlds of inside and outside the ghetto as “another planet.” He describes how he learned to survive as a 12 year-old. He talks about the “big smugglers” and how they worked only till 1942. Later the kids became their victims. After his mother’s death he hardly returned to the ghetto. He spent most of his time with his brother Peretz.
- 3:46: He continues to describe their life during 1943-1944, when he almost ‘broke down’ with the difficulty of not having a regular sleeping place and being continuously on the run. Although they earned well from the cigarette trade, it was not a life and he had close encounters with the Germans. He witnessed seven Polish priests hanged by the Germans and the beginnings of the Polish underground. His contact with the Jewish underground was Shimon, who later provided him with documents to ease their existence somewhat. However “Jewish children had no place to sleep.”
- 4:00: Poles were generally hostile to Germans. As their youth and elders were taken to work in Germany they were provided with news of the war’s progression. He talks about the time when the Polish underground became stronger. He, his brother Peretz and others started selling newspapers as well, so he learned more of the war that way.
- 4:11: He describes a particularly ‘good period’ when they stayed with Sabina, a Polish gentile woman, who sewed clothes for them, and they gave her food gifts. “She provided a real bed and sheets for the first time in years.” They left after being suspected of being Jewish by one of Sabina’s guests.
- Otherwise they lived like dogs in constant danger. They were often suspected of being thieves because of the places where they were hiding at night. The ghetto surroundings were a forbidden area.
- He describes another area they visited, Praga, and meeting people from the criminal underground. It was dangerous but they could wash themselves and they found clothes there. Occasionally they received food from Polish hospital cooks. Sundays were spent out of town, on long tram rides as well as in the theaters and movie houses. He describes how they took care of their occasional wounds and infections.
- 4: 43: He lists the names of most of the group’s members in August 1944. He describes the relationships among themselves as sharing and caring, compared to their competition with the outside world. He talks about how they survived in Warsaw. He describes his relation with Shimon and his subsequent trip to Israel.
- 5:10: When the German occupation weakened and the Allies advanced, the danger to the remaining Jews increased. He and his brother joined the awakening Polish

revolt, demonstrating skill and becoming 'contact men' (messengers). He changed his name and became Andek Hospilich's assistant. He describes their assorted sabotage actions; how they collected food dropped by Russian planes, how he succeeded in entering a German Wehrmacht position to spy, how Peretz was involved in and contributed to the 'Bunker explosion' which caused many German casualties. The fighters were not allowed to steal food from civilian population.

- 6:00: Then came the bombardment by the Germans and Russian help was not welcomed. There was a general lack of supplies and medicine. Germans were mining bridges. He confessed to his commander he was Jewish and decided to stay with the capitulating fighters.
- 6:14: He describes the death and destruction that he saw everywhere. After they surrendered, they were lead on a 17 kilometer march from Warsaw to Ojarov, a station with train cars similar to those in the Umschlagplatz. He was transported by train to Langsdorf on the German border. There he lived through one month of terrible conditions. He next, moved to Milberg, Germany which was considered a "good camp." There they were treated as war POW and received Red Cross packages. He was in a group of 50 children between the ages of 10 to 16 out of a total of 600 children at the camp.
- 6:27: He shows photos, medals, books and other documents related to the period.
- 6:29: They were transferred to another place to work at an aircraft facility. He describes their work there, their managers, and how he became a translator. He describes how three or six Jewish children were identified, and suffered beatings for stealing food by other youths. He thinks the bombardment in late February of 1945 in nearby Dresden may have been the reason for taking all the youth out to march towards the train station. Then the guards left and more bombardments left many dead.
- 6:48: The following day, May 5, 1945, the Russian army arrived and they were liberated. Perez and he started on their way to Warsaw, to seek relatives but they were separated. He proceeded by himself, a move which he feels guilty about, and Peretz resents to this day.
- He describes in detail the burned out and changed Warsaw he encountered. He describes the hidden cigarettes he retrieved from the old lady's home and how he met his older brother Leon. The first months of living there it was tense between them and the relationship with the Russians. A few months later he found more relatives and learned about what had happened to others. It was then that he found out about his mother's death in Majdanek.
- 7:09: He describes his life in Krakow and how they tried to simulate a "kibbutz" life. He prepared for illegal immigration; manufacturing and selling brushes, meeting his brother Perez and transferring to the American zone.

- 7:22: In Marseille, he boarded a small old boat with 700 other people. He experienced terrible trip conditions during their 14 day voyage until they were caught by the British and deported to Cyprus in August of 1946.
- 7:30: He arrived in Palestine as a Youth Aliyah member. His brothers were already there and were trained as Palmach soldiers and fought in various places during the war of independence.
- 7:45: He describes his work and family. "He fought wars for ten years of his life, from age 10 to 20; one war after the other." He did not feel 'discriminated against' as a Holocaust refugee like many others, and believed this was due to his immediate recruitment into the Palmach. There he was like all other Israelis from the beginning. He always told his sons about his experiences. He also lectures to different groups. "It is either luck or hutzpa that I survived".

Summarized by Hava Bonne'
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