

RG-50.120 #0201 6 Tapes  
DAVID RUHER

TAPE I

- 1.00 David Ruher [pronunciation Ru'er] was born on March 10, 1913 in Lublin. His parents were Asher and Zelta [nee Goldberg]. Name was transcribed Ruher by his grandfather, whose origins were in Germany, in the district of Ruhr. Grandfather was born in Zamosc, then moved to Lublin. David's family was part of the small bourgeoisie. His father was an accountant.
- 3.21 When war broke out, David was serving a prison sentence in Kornorowo, in the region of Pomerania. The jailers escaped, and the criminal prisoners broke out of their cells. They taught the political prisoners, David among them, how to break out of their own cells. David ran away towards the south, towards Lublin.
- 4.47 David was jailed twice, for his communist activities in Lublin, and then for starting a revolt in jail. In the second sentence, he was considered dangerous and therefore kept in isolation. A red sign on the cell door read 'dangerous'; that afforded him the respect of the guards and, eventually, that of two additional criminals, jailed with him for lack of space.
- 9.32 David did not complete his second sentence because, due to the adoption of a new constitution in Poland, in 1934, and the granting of amnesty to some prisoners. David was let go on January 3, 1936, and he returned to Lublin where after a month off, he renewed his activities in the communist party. This was the war of the Popular Front, in France, the Spanish revolution.
- 10.30 David was a faithful communist. He didn't look Jewish. His activities were centered on the Polish youth. They penetrated the Catholic university, the girls' gymnasia [ran by nuns], worked with organizing farmers to obtain free parcels of land. The disturbances were great, and 4,000 police [many cadets among them] were brought in to squelch them. The organizers were the Popular Front, the PPS, and the Farmers' Party. David and a few friends went to Zamosc[?], center of the revolt, to try to keep it under control, as a demonstration only, for fear of large number of victims.
- 12.53 Return to Lublin. In the meantime, in Russia, Stalin organized the purge of all leaders of the communist party, the Red army and more, accusing them of collaboration with the Nazis. This had a negative influence in Poland, where members of the Popular Front, the PPS and the Farmers' Party began distancing themselves from the communists.

- 13.40 In the autumn, at the time of the regional conference of the party, David - representing the regional committee - demanded from the central committee to explain the purge of the 'who is who' of the communist party. David and his co-representative - a Polish young man - were not satisfied, and said so. They were not willing to continue without satisfactory answers. David reminded the meeting of Lenin's words: 'If the party serves the people, they will flock to it; if it doesn't, the masses will run away from it'. David and his friend were thrown out of the party, and David dissolved the regional committee.
- 16.36 In January, the police arrested David, and took him to Bereza-Kartuska, to a concentration camp. There, they were beaten for 2 weeks, day and night, and also were abused physically [?]. It was a 'terror' camp. After the first 2 weeks, they were sent to forced labor with cement and other works, and forced them to complete military exercises [only given as punishment]. David did not believe he would survive, and only expected to die.
- 20.22 The entire elite of the communist party was located in Kartiez-Bereza: Polish, Ukrainian and Byelorussian.
- 20.30 In the summer, David was informed of the charges against him, and sent to Lublin for trial. David and another friend decided to use the trial to explain their position. David confirmed that he had belonged to the communist party, and been a secretary for the youth committee. Then, he asked permission to speak, knowing full well that a long sentence awaited him. First, he declared he no longer belongs to the communist party because all the leaders of the Polish communist party were falsely accused, by Stalin, with collaboration with the espionage section of the Polish army. Stalin condemned them to death. David said, 'in the presence of this august court, I declare Stalin the worst criminal in the history of humankind'. David asked to have his accusation from treason to 'political stupidity', but since the latter category didn't exist, he was sentenced to serve for 5 years in prison. His testimony was carried in the press, and caused an uproar. The other accused, repeated David's accusations.
- 29.24 David was sent to a large prison in Rawicz.
- 32.37 David's parents were not happy with his political activities. David believed fervently in Lenin's theories, and Marx and Engels' too. The beginning of his interest in the workers' conditions was when David was 14 years old. He and his family lived in a mixed building. In one of the floors the builder' trade union met. They held meetings there, and David, with nothing else

to do, attended them. In time, he was used as 'recording secretary'. He absorbed everything he heard, and was appreciated for that and for his youth. Slowly, David became interested in the workers' movement. Hashomer Hatzair met in the building too. He attended many of these sessions as well. They based their beliefs in the Marxist version of Ber Borochov: that is, he saw in the Jewish proletariat the resurrections of national life in Eretz Israel. They wanted to be Marxists in Eretz Israel. When Ahad Haam's theories about Israel as a spiritual Jewish life began to be discussed, when they saw that just a few of the members could emigrate to Eretz Israel will not solve the massive problem of the Jews. Interesting things happened to its members. One of them, Misha Bronshtein, made it to Palestine, and became communist there; others became communist and emigrated to the Soviet Union. During this ideological struggle, the Hashomer Hatzair became even more left-leaning, and many of its youth joined the Komsomol.

- 39.53 Misha Bronshtein, one of those leaders of the Hashomer Hatzair, managed to leave Poland and joined the International Brigade in the Spanish war as a commander under Tito. When Tito returned to Yugoslavia, Misha showed up in Poland, after the war, under the name of General Bron. He was in the central committee of the communist party, was in the headquarters of the Polish army and became Poland's military attaché to Yugoslavia after Tito's victory.
- 41.03 David found Bron, 4 years before his recorded testimony, make a life in Sweden. There, Bron fled as a consequence of another Stalinist purge of the leaders of Poland.
- 42.06 Bron visited Israel as a consequence of that encounter, and not many of the remnant communist Jews. Bron wrote many books, about his experiences in Spain and more, but never mentioned Israel.
- 43.56 David's grandfather belonged to the Mitnagoim, a movement opposed to Chasidism. He was a Zionist. David and family lived with his grandfather at the time of the Balfour declaration, when Herbert Samuel was appointed the first Jewish High Commissioner there. The grandfather wrote Samuel a poem, in 'gematria' demonstrating that Samuel was a descendant of King David. Samuel answered, thanked the grandfather and offered to send him an immigration certificate. But the grandfather thought he was too old and infirm to immigrate. Grandfather did not impart much of a Jewish education to his children. In David's home, they kept kosher, and went to synagogue only on main holidays, or to say yizkor. Despite this, grandfather suffered greatly by David's communist involvement.

46.00 David has 2 sisters: one married a Christian and stayed in Poland; the other lives in Israel.

49.58 While active in communist circles, David always maintained he can be Jewish too. He was proud of the ideas Judaism bequeathed to the world, and of the personalities active in the party, the majority of the Jewish. He said he was a Jew by nationality, but a Pole culturally, as Polish were the first words whispered him by his mother.

2.00.00 The regime in Kartuz-Bereze's terror concentration camp. His confinement while in that camp.

33.19 His imprisonment after the trial, in Rawicz.

42.00 Description of Kartuz-Bereze.

44.00 Many of the other prisoners were former leaders of the communist party.

51.28 David is moved to a former convent in Koronavo, after his stay in Rawicz.

54.00 The road back to Lublin after war breaks.

3.01.00 Encounter with his family [parents and sisters] on Rosh Hashanah. Great joy. That same night, the Germans entered Lublin. David's communist friends flee to the Russian section of Poland; he stays with his family.

5.00 Life during that time.

18.00 Tricks to survive and to circulate freely in the city.

25.00 The Judenrat. About Jewish collaborators in Lilpova, also underworld, agents and informers. Relocations within Lublin.

33.00 The Jewish police.

35.40 The family moves in with the grandmother, after selling all the furniture that was not portable. David insisted that only the essentials still be kept.

45.48 Ghetto in Lublin is being built. Majdanek is being built. It is 1940.

## TAPE II

4.02.42 There were 40,000 Jews in Lublin before the war. It was a medieval town.

- 3.04 Influx of Jewish refugees into Lublin after 1939.
- 5.52 The suffering of the refugees. The overcrowding of Lublin. The horrible sights.
- 16.31 Lubliners were sent to build Belzec.
- 20.00 Places of work.
- 38.03 David's Polish friends tell him about Belzec in the summer of 1940 or 1941.
- 40.45 David decides to leave Lublin because he knows that the SS is looking for him. His rationale for choosing a village to seek refuge.
- 5.10.10 David finds refuge for his family in the colony of Czechowice, at the home of the Polish brothers Anthony and Vincenzo Kozlowsky. They had known David's father many years before. But, at the last minute, they get cold feet.
- 35.15 Another place of refuge is found by David in Melgiew, at the farm of the Yaczewskis.
- 53.50 David supported his family. He would go to Lublin often, and he saw the deterioration there. David made sure that each member of his family had a good pair of shoes, in case of deportation. It was the winter of '40-'41.
- 6.12.03 War breaks out between Russia and Germany in June. Part of their house in Melgiew is confiscated for mail delivery.
- 35.07 David decides to take his family to Germany. For that purpose, then get baptized in the local church and receive birth certificates with a different name.
- 36.00 The plan to move to Germany, via Lublin, to volunteer as Polish workers for the war effort.
- 52.00 David and his father part ways. David was not to see his father again. [Very emotional segment.] David continues to Lublin. The road.

### TAPE III

- 1.00.40 The way to the house where David's mother and sister were waiting for him.
- 1.13 About the family hosting the 2 women, the Woyczaks.

- 19.10 The plan to go to Germany begins to unravel. David is told that all the Polish male volunteers have to undergo frequent infections. These consist of lowering their pants. David's sister decides that she has found a way to save herself and her boy friend and his family by going to Warsaw. David still is worried about how to extricate his father from Piaski Luterski, where he was hiding and waiting for David. The news is that it will be near impossible to extract the father, as the ghetto is guarded by the SS.
- 42.03 David is ready to leave Lublin for a nearby farm in Lubartov to hire himself out as a temporary worker. He has false ID. Helping an old lady in the train, buys him one night lodging at her home in Lubartov.
- 8.37.00 Getting in touch with the underground in Lukow. [Sept. 1942]
- 50.12 David becomes a tax collector in Lvov and its surroundings. He is in Zhelechow. It used to be a Jewish town, but was no more.
- 9.22.47 Having obtained an official work permit, David could now travel to Lublin, to find out his mother's address in Germany. The mother and sister were in a work camp: the mother in the kitchen, the sister at the office of a factory that produced gas. They were in the city Dessau am Oder, in a camp called Kapen. They were there until the end of the war.
- 23.51 He was told, while in Lublin, that his other sister was in Warsaw, living on Tamka Street.
- 27.55 At the end of 1947, David went to visit his sister in Warsaw. While there he made connections with different underground groups.
- 40.00 David witnesses the liquidation of the Jews of Lukov. The story of Berek Joselevicz, born Jew, served in the Polish rebellion under Tadeusz Kosciuszko. He was shot to death by an Austrian soldier, who later was found to be a Jew. The rabbi of Kotzk refused to bury Joselivica in a Jewish cemetery because, he said, he served in the Polish army. Joselivicz was buried by a Polish aristocrat, and a stone marks his place of burial to this day. Berek Joselevicz was the name of one of the streets of the Lukov ghetto.
- 52.00 David's social life in Lukov, as tax collector by the name of Bogdan Kozak.

#### TAPE IV

10:01:30 Lukov has 20,000 inhabitants. 80% of the population before the war was Jewish. Most of them were taken to Treblinka. Those killed in the town

were buried in a neighboring one, Grezowka. David lives there as a Pole. Begins dating a Polish young woman. He forgets his Judaism

- 08.00 The romance flourishes, but David rejects all insinuations of marriage. The Polish family was originally from Kalish. When drunk at a celebration, they begin to mock the Jews. David decides to call off his romance.
- 24.22 About Kalish, one of the most ancient in Poland.
- 30.00 The end of Adamova, another Jewish neighboring town. Antisemitism in other surrounding villages.
- 11.06.33 David manages to travel once a month to Warsaw and once to Lublin.
- 08.23 David is afflicted with 'scabies' around his sex organ. Since, as a Pole, he cannot consult a Polish doctor [who will discover David is a Jew], he travels to Lublin, to consult a captive Jewish doctor. He receives treatment, and goes back to Lukov. David offers Dr. Ziegelwaks to work for him in Lukov [he is the doctor who treated him] but the doctor refuses, as his wife - hiding in a different place - will worry. Ziegelwaks never takes advantage of David's offer. At the end, he and the rest are transported to Maidanek. Ziegelwaks' wife survives. Today she is David's wife.
- 20.00 Encounter with a bookshelf full of classics, in one of the tax collection trips in the village of Lubov. Reading Horatius to the cows. The encounter with an aristocrat and her daughter.
- 30.00 The encounter with a Carmelite monk.
- 45.14 The end of the friendship with the lady and her daughter.
- 45.38 Around 1944, he visits Lublin again. Before leaving to go back to Lukov, he buys a pair of climbing boots. He is recognized by one of his former neighbors, and saves himself by faking that he has hand grenades in his backpack [it was actually the nails of the climbing boots!] Upon his return to Lukov, David decides never to go back to Lublin again.
- 56.38 It was 1944. The Red Army was approaching.
- 12.01.00 Emergency trip to Warsaw, to see his sister who is in trouble. David decides to take her away, and bring her to Lukov. The Russians arrive.
- 33.55 After the entrance of the Russians, David's sister goes to Lublin. David stays another week in Lukov.

43.32 Encounter in Lublin with some of his communist friends.

#### TAPE IV [?]

13.00.00 The entire hour is devoted to the trial in which David testified in 1937.

14.06.36 David's first steps back in Lublin in 1944. The communist party, KPP, was no longer in existence.

07.37 Meeting with Jacob Berman. He presented the Workers Polish Party [PPR]. David is offered work there, but not affiliation, as long as he doesn't occupy himself with politics, and as long as he controls his mother.

15.27 David is offered work in the supply department of the popular police force.

45.00 The militia moves towards Warsaw. David is appointed manager of the encampment.

53.55 After months of waiting in nearby Warsaw to enter the city [in the meantime the Polish uprising there ended tragically]. The militia returns to Lublin, and David to his former job. But, in the meantime the Jewish communists begin their return from Russia to Lublin. One of them uncovers the real identity of David, including his prison time, and begins to spread rumors about him. David's commander, who knows of his past but declares he cannot stop the rumor-monger, gives him the opportunity to go to Officers' school in Chem.

#### TAPE V

15.00.00 Through the intervention of a former fellow prisoner, he is discharged from the obligation to go to Chelm.

03.15 David's sister, Judith, who is working as secretary of the workers' union, tries to find him a civilian job.

10.47 He is accepted as assistant director of administration of the union of leather-workers, with one condition: to stop the returning Russians from raiding and stealing the merchandise. He asks for 24 hour to prove himself.

15.00 He succeeds.

24.22 David meets his future wife, who is recommended to him for the position of director of marketing.

28.22 At the end of May, 1945, David reunites in Lublin with his mother and sister.

After many years in the leather factory, he is fired for political reasons. In the meantime, his wife to be receives a certificate to go to Palestine. David decides to join her, and is sent to Warsaw to wait. In the meantime, he is given a job as a writer in the publication "Opinia", which comes out of Lodz.

#### TAPE VI

16.00.00 In mid-1946, the situation began to change for David. Many Stalinists began arriving; they checked his past, assumed he was stealing from the factory and wanted a cut. Also, there were other accusations.

15.00 Antisemitic incidents. The Kielce pogrom.

25.59 David's analysis of Polish attitudes toward the Jews.

30.00 Exiting Poland.

48.26 Arrival in Israel before 1948.