

RG-50.120 #209

5 TAPES

MORDKHILEVICH, VLADIMIR

- 1.00 Born 1933 in Minsk. Family moved to Moscow in 1935 where Vladimir's father studied and then worked in a leather tanning enterprise. Vladimir had an older brother. Mother worked in a kindergarten.
- 1.07 In August 1937, his father was arrested. Father was sentenced to 10 years in a camp in Magadan. [V.M. does not give charges against father.] In October 1937 V's mother arrested and also sent to a camp. During this time, V's brother living with grandmother in Minsk. V, now alone, was sent to an orphanage near the city of Vladimir.
- 1.13 In 1939 V taken by his mother's sister to live with her family in Minsk.
- 1.15 V shows documents and photos of extended family.
- 1.18 Interviewer asks for details about family before the war. V talks about family, extent to which grandparents were religious. V says he didn't encounter anti-Semitism as a child, in kindergarten or school.

[Break]

- 2.00 In June of 1941, he was in summer camp of kindergarten, he remembers bombing of Minsk and arrival of German troops at camp. V was taken back to Minsk by a teacher. Soon after, V saw his uncle and a large number of men marched away by Germans. He never saw his uncle again, and learned later that the entire troop was shot.
- 2.08 Minsk ghetto established and V's extended family had to move. His house was on Dimitrovia St.
- 2.11 On Nov u, 1941 there was a 'pogrom' in the ghetto. V and some relatives hid in a barn. One child ran out in the open and was killed by a Latvian policeman. A number of other relatives were also killed. V other others hid.
- 2.14 Germans and some local citizens took a lot of warm clothing from Jews.
- 2.17 In the winter, perhaps Jan. 1942, V fell ill with typhus. Was sent to hospital. Towards spring, released from hospital.
- 2.22 V and other children, sneaking out of ghetto, went to freight yard and sometimes stole things from German, Italian and Hungarian trains. Often begged from soldiers. V danced and many soldiers often gave them bread, soup.

- 2.27 Ghetto had a section for Jews from Germany, whom Soviet Jews always referred to as 'Hamburg Jews' although V does not know exactly where they were from.
- 2.31 Various Jews working at railroad station warned V's family about impending pogroms and they were able to hide. They avoided a major pogrom in July 1942, but many relatives were killed.
- 2.35 V tells about various incidents which occurred as boys tried to steal things from trains. Occasionally caught and beaten. Occasionally treated kindly.
- 2.47 V says he spent much of his time at the freight station, sleeping in various places. Rarely returned to ghetto.
- 2.53 V's older brother Leonio makes contact with partisans in spring of 1943. Partisans take small groups from ghetto to join them.
- 2.56 V and Leonid left ghetto to join partisans, in May 1943. Many Jews gathered in village and were led to forest.
- 2.58 V and his brother stop to pick berries and become separated from group. Are taken in for a while by a local peasant woman. Then fled when the woman warned them that 'white Poles' were approaching.
- 3.00 Finally found partisan group. But partisan leader didn't want children - especially Jewish children - in unit. Later, were taken to the partisan headquarters of the area. V and brother sent to the 106th 'family partisan unit' which numbered around 150 persons.
- 3.10 Interviewer asks V to return to outbreak of war. He says he really remembers very little; he especially does not remember any of his own reactions, saying children could understand nothing of what was going on.
- 3.12 Says many of his relatives stayed in Minsk because many Jews believed Germans would treat Jews well as they had in 1918. Dismissed stories of Nazi anti-Semitism as Soviet propaganda.
- 3.20 Interviewer asks about ghetto life, Judenrat. V's memories are not firm.
- 3.29 Interviewer asks how Germans treated children at railway station. He says in various ways some good food, some not. He remembers being asked by a German officer if he was Jewish. When V said 'yes', officer then gave him bread. V was more afraid of local police than of Germans.
- 3.38 Asked again about life in ghetto, V says he knows little. First, he was a child; second, he spent most of his time at the railway station.

- 3.50 Interviewer asks about details of his final departure from ghetto and experiences on his way to join partisans. V and his brother Lyonya [short for Leionid] covered 100 km in their travels from Minsk to the town of Nalebokiy [phonetic] in Baranoviacy oblast, where their partisan unit was located.

TAPE II

- 4.00 Interviewer asks about ghetto experience. V says he was in hospital with typhus in Jun. of 1942. Doesn't know much about how people lived through cold. [He was 9 years old.] Says he doesn't remember much.
- 4.10 V says there were rumors in 1943 in the ghetto that certain partisan units shot Jews. Many people were therefore hesitant to try to flee to partisans. After war he heard stories to this effect.
- 4.14 Interviewer asks about German Jews brought to Minsk ghetto. V says he had little contact with them.
- 4.24 V talks about train movements through station - trains with German wounded, fights between Italian and Germans. Says that German 'field troops' were not 'fearful'. They were not 'infected' with hate. He felt at the time that the ordinary German Soldiers did not like SS men, Gestapo, or the local police.

[Break]

- 4.38 Continues with details of ghetto life.
- 4.45 Discusses his activities at train station, songs he learned.
- 4.52 Interviewer asks about presence of Latvians in police units. He said Latvian units operated only during pogroms.
- 4.55 V says Italian soldiers were all good fellows, never did anything cruel.
- 5.02 Says local Byelorussian residents of Minsk were not helpful to Jews. Many reported on Jews to Germans. Only a small percentage helped Jews.
- 5.05 Discusses leaving ghetto in spring of 1943 on journey to join partisans. Arrived with a group at the Nalebokskayia forest in Baranovichy oblast.
- 5.10 V and brother get separated from partisan unit - he doesn't remember how - and are left on their own. An old woman fed them and let them stay the night. Then she told them to leave because anti-Soviet Polish partisans were approaching her house.
- 5.13 Found another partisan unit. It was a 'family' unit - wives and children

accompanied fighters.

- 5.19 German began to surround and blockade partisan units, but partisans able to get food, crossing swamps.
- 5.22 V talks about life in partisan camp - about songs.
- 5.25 Remembers an alarm, when partisans ran to hide in swamp. V fell into swamp. Pulled out and continues running [V was only 10 at the time.]
- 5.34 One day a group of people V knew from the Minsk ghetto arrived at the camp. These people brought the news that the g----- of Byelorussia, Kube had been killed. They also said that the Minsk ghetto had been razed. V shows list of persons who were killed.
- 5.38 In the fall, V and unit moved to a new camp - with better facilities.
- 5.42 Discusses military operations of unit - acquiring arms, blowing up rail lines.
- 5.49 Discusses formation of Pioneer group among children in camp, school classes, concerts, songs.

[Break]

- 6.04 Soviet troops reached area and met partisans.
- 6.07 V and brother returned to Minsk.
- 6.08 V shows partisan documents from airlines.
- 6.22 V asked for details on V's journey from ghetto to partisan unit.
- 6.25 Discusses partisan leader Zorin.
- 6.32 Asked what V did in partisan unit. He answers 'nothing'; he was a child. There was no schooling. He was basically without oversight. Scrounged for food.
- 6.48 Discusses various persons he knew in ghetto.
- 6.57 Discusses what he knows about unit's military activities - very little.

TAPE III

- 7.00 Asked about reaction on meeting advancing Soviet army. V says his reactions, like those of other children, muted. They were interested mostly in food.
- 7.24 V and brother returned to Minsk in June 1944. They were placed in children's home by a soldier. Talks about activities in children's home - working, playing,

running around; sneaking into movie theatres.

- 7.34 Begins school - first grade - in Sept. 1944. Describes school and life in children's home.

[Break]

- 8.00 Describes incident in Feb. 1945 which someone put up a portrait of Stalin in the bathroom. Authorities in response changed entire staff at the children's home.
- 8.05 Discusses cultural activities at children's home.
- 8.10 Says that anti-Semitic songs and feelings began to emerge in early post-war years - 1946, 47, 48.
- 8.22 Describes celebration on Victory Day, May 9, 1945.
- 8.27 V meets his mother fir first time since before the war. Says he had no reaction.
- 8.33 Describes how a female cousin, who worked at his children's home, died in a fire which broke out during a New Year's Eve celebration at a ministry building.
- 8.34 Says mother was ill after being 8 years in prison.
- 8.35 V is transferred to a children's home in Baranrvichskiy oblast. Shortly thereafter went to live with his mother.
- 8.38 Describes circumstances under which mother found him after she got out of penal system.
- 8.41 V goes to live with his mother in Radashkovichy, about 40 km northwest of Minsk.
- 8.42 Asked if he wants to add anything further to his comments on life in the children's home. V tells more about games he played, other experiences.
- 8.47 Asked about anti-Semitism. V said encountered none during the war. In 1946-48 heard anti-Semitic jokes.
- 8.52 Discusses his schooling while in the children's home.

[Break]

- 9.00 In Radashkovick mother worked as bookkeeper, for 'miserly' wages. Lived with a man.

- 9.03 Talks about experiences in Radashkovich.
- 9.11 In Nov. 1947 V's father comes to Radashkovich. He looked elderly, and weak. Mother decided to remain with the man she was with, and his father left. He later married another woman.
- 9.15 In 1948 V goes to live with his father in the town of Ashmyany [near the Lithuanian border on the road from Minsk to Vilnius]. He likes life there better than in Radashkovich - more friends, a bigger town.
- 9.23 Describes cultural events he participated in.
- 9.26 V denied entry into Komsomol - undoubtedly because both his parents had been sent to the gulag in the 1930s.
- 9.28 In 1950 a neighbor was arrested. V's father decided to leave the area because of danger of arrest. Went to Tomsk.
- [Break]
- 9.32 Asked about relationship between his older brother Lyonya [Leonid] and their father. V says not good. Lyonya was a construction worker in Minsk. He was a busy man. He visited father rarely.
- 9.36 V's father: new wife was Polish Jew; during war had been in ghetto, then a slave laborer in Stuttgart. She and his father spoke Yiddish.
- 9.39 Asked whether family observed religious traditions. V says, father and wife observed Passover, Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur.
- 9.43 In Jan 1951 family moved to Tomsk, in Siberia.
- 9.45 V says that during his time in Sahmyany he began to doubt Soviet system. He heard about death of Jewish actor Mikhoels [sp?] and doubted official version that it was an accident. Many people he knew had been arrested. He heard from acquaintances criticism of Stalin, Lenin.
- 9.50 V discusses relationship with mother and father.
- 9.59 Says he never discussed in detail with them his experiences during the war.
- TAPE IV
- 10.00 V leaves Belarus [?] for Siberia. Father feared an anti-Semitic campaign in west. Father had left in Oct. 1w950, and V and step-mother followed in Jan. 1951.
- 10.06 Arrived in Tomsk after a seven day train journey from Moscow. Then went by

train 90 km from Tomsk to town of Asino [90 km NE of Tomsk]. Then went to village of Minayevka [phonetic] 75 km from Asino. Father felt the further from urban area, the better would be for a quiet life - with no threats from purges. Lived in poverty for a while.

- 10.10 Population in area made up largely of people who had been exiled to Siberia or had been in gulag.
- 10.13 Discusses life in Minayevka. Lots of drinking, some fights. But father was respected. Worked with agricultural machinery - repair work.
- 10.20 Discusses people he knew in area. Tells story of a school teacher who disappeared into the gulag for telling a joke berating the Kolkhoz system.
- 10.33 Tells about father's barn which he had built, chicken house, etc. Began to live better. Went hunting for various game birds, with local friends.
- 10.40 Talks about step-mother.
- 10.42 Asked about other Jews in Minayevka. V says there was one. Discusses school, lack of cultural activities.
- 10.50 V lived for a year and a half in Minayevska, then left to study in a mining trade school. V describes how the director of the school, like many people in Siberia, did not know what a ghetto was or about how the Jews had been treated during the war. [The issue came up when the director read V's biography in his school entrance application.]
- 10.57 Discusses lively student life in Tomsk.
- 11.00 [Break]
- 11.01 Discusses fights among students.
- 11.06 Discusses how he began to smoke.
- 11.09 Discusses how in 1952 doctors' plot story proticized[?]. Also discusses a Jewish faculty member who had been arrested before the war and died in 1953. Says that he had only few Jewish acquaintances in Tomsk.
- 11.20 Visits family in March 1953. Then on return trip to Tomsk drops in at friend's house to find family celebrating 'good news' - Stalin is dying. When he arrives in Tomsk finds out that Stalin has died.
- 11.26 Father gets better job and to Asino.
- 11.27 V begins working in a mine - practical work as a student. Discusses life and

youth escapades. Works in another mine - aluminum ore - as a student worker.

- 11.40 Discusses one period of student work in Kazakhstan, where there were many fights between Russian workers and Chechens, who had been exiled to the area in 1944. V got along with Chechens.
- 11.44 Discusses dances that were popular in Tomsk.
- 11.50 Many Lithuanians in the area - who had been exiled by Stalin before and after the war. V got along with them. Compared to Siberians, they were neater, harder working, and more prosperous.
- 11.56 Finishes mining school and goes to work in a tin mine in Khapcheranga, Chita oblast near the Mongolian border - in 1955. Led a dissipated life - carousing. Nothing to do, no clubs, no cultural entertainment. All the young people acted this way.
- 12.00 Tells about Japanese POWs who worked in the mines after the war, often died and their bodies were thrown down one of the mine shafts. The shaft was 'half full of bodies'.
- 12.05 V tells of mining work. Gets himself drafted into the army in the winter of 1955.
- 12.07 Asked, V discusses life in the technical school - his daily schedule.
- 12.10 Talks about relationship with mother and brother while he was a student.
- 12.26 Asked about anti-Semitism in his student days. He says he didn't experience it.
- 12.32 Talks about his army life. At first stationed near Chita. Says his initial time in the army was 'the darkest in my life'. Hazing of recruits was severe. There were many suicides, desertions.
- 12.41 V gets sick with serious bronchitis.
- 12.42 Talks about Jews in his unit.
- 12.47 His division was sent to the Caucasus in 1956. [There was unrest in the Middle East.] Life was better there for the troops. Climate was warmer, food was better. V was a radio operator.

TAPE V

- 13.01 V discusses how his father was rehabilitated in 1956 [cleared of the charges against him in 1937].

- 13.02 V released from army. Returns to father in Liberia. Discusses 'Khrushchev thaw', relaxation in every area of life. He goes to Tomsk, enrolls in music school. After graduation he was sent to teach music in a school in the far north.
- 13.09 Father returned and moves to Maykop. V goes to Gomel. Meets his future wife. He moves to Gomel. Worked as a cultural leader in an engine factory.
- 13.12 Recalls 1967 Six Day War and reaction among his friends.
- 13.14 Father died in Oct. 1967. He begins working in a school.
- 13.19 Discusses anti-Semitism in his school. He leaves, goes to another school to teach.
- 13.27 In 1987 moved to Kharkov - taught in schools. Wife works as English teacher.
- 13.30 Considers going to Israel in 1990. Begins process.
- 13.33 Mother died in 1985. Receives permission to emigrate.
- 13.36 Emigrates to Israel. Discusses life in Israel. Works as street sweeper. Considerable anti-Russian feeling among residents of his town - Gidara [phonetic]. Takes part in concerts and wins plaudits of town. Discusses various relatives in Israel.
- [Break]
- 14.00 Describes getting in touch with his uncle who had left long ago for Australia.
- 14.10 Now retired. Spends time singing in concerts.
- 14.12 Asked whether V mentioned father's imprisonment when he filled out applications during his various careers. He says he did so. Asked also whether he acknowledged his stay in ghetto. He avoided this. Soviets always were for some reason suspicious of Jews who survived [also suspicious of Soviet POWs who survived].
- 14.18 Discusses atmosphere of anti-Semitism in USSR.
- 14.19 Describes his growing hatred of communism.
- 14.23 Talks about occasional return of memories and feelings of years in ghetto and among partisans - dreams of war period.
- 14.35 Asked about character of partisan unit leader Zorin. Zorin was kind to V - who was a child - but appeared to be cruel at times. V tells of incident in which Zorin orders the shooting of two village boys who had discovered their partisan

camp - fearing they might tell the Germans.