

RG-50.120 #0230
EHRlich ALEXANDER

I

- 1.00 Introduction: Alexander, only son, Lodz, middle class, born 1928. 50 years after war, does not remember, cannot write. Memory of KZ camp only after talks and therapy.
- 1.03 Childhood: Was not very social. Played with children when 10 years old. Had a nanny [Jewish]. Father: director of a textile business which belonged to grandfather. Production and export. A client sent letters and money in 1941.
- 1.08 Family: Parents: Pinches and Rachel. Father managed his father's textile business. Mother did not work. Grandparents - maternal lived in Lodz. Grandfather - fraternal[?] - he did not like. Was in Lodz. There were 3 cousins, not in Lodz. Family had no contact with them. Father's family were not believers [atheists]. Mother's family was religious. Grandfather was Gabai in synagogue, second largest in Lodz. Father ate horse meat, which the rabbi allowed. Mother and her mother did not. On holidays went to synagogue. Learned to pray from grandfather. Grandfather died from blood poisoning in 1939.
- 1.11 Episode: father was caught on street and arrested. Was released.
- 1.15 Family went away on vacation 2 months every year. Alexander and mother stayed away, father visited.

[Tape interruption.]

They spoke Hebrew, celebrated Chanukah. Lived in big house, 8 rooms. They liked cantoral music. He loved debate [?]. Jewish neighbors, gentile superintendent. Had several uncles and aunts in Lodz and Germany. 1938 uncle was expelled from German [he is only survivor].

- 1.22 Antisemitism: They lived in Jewish environment, did not feel antisemitism. Business sold to Germans through agents. Some brought money to the ghetto. In 1945 some returned belongings to the family. Cousin of grandfather escaped to Italy - became sick.
- 1.31 Before war and after: They were optimistic. Did not know what was going on. Did not know about KZs. In ghetto there was a radio. Could not hear international news. Germans misled by false information. Germans humiliated. Belief was that this will stop.
- 1.34 War: The Poles fled from borders. There was curfew. There was a Judenrat [Jewish Council]. Went to school until 4th grade. Did not think of fleeing. Father fled to Russia and did not return. Those who fled to Warsaw died. Those who fled south also died. Alex went to school. It got gradually worse. Grandfather stopped work. Germans confiscated the business. Financially they did okay. Black market. 1942 there was hunger.

- 1.45 Ghetto: The SA expelled Jews from their apartments. Jews were seized for labor. There were Polish, Germans, and Volksdeutsche. Jewish property became ownerless. Beards were cut of religious. As father trimmed his beard. Synagogues were burnt. Gypsies were killed first. Furs were taken. Parts of cemeteries were destroyed. Had 2 rooms for 10 people. Toilets were in yard. Jews from villages sent to ghetto. From new baby there was smell which frustrated. Father's family went to Warsaw and died there.
- 1.58 Conditions in ghetto: First there were letters from other ghettos. A worked in factory. He worked and studied there. Had private teacher for several pupils. After work they could study. There was a science library. Father managed a store [meat]. Mother worked. Grandparents were home. Grandmother worked in a storage place.
- 2.04 Culture: Does not remember, but there was. Theater and Synagogue. 1941 Germans visited the synagogue.
- 2.01 Food: Dreamed about apples. No eggs.
- Action: Fire Department took part. Jewish police. Closed a street and seized every 10th person. These did not return. People hid under roofs. Fire fighters searched apartments. Apparently for murder. Another: assembled people, Jews hid children. Apparently for murder. A does not remember. He thought that this was everything important. The Germans asked for people for the Jewish Council. A did not understand, thought about this, will not happen to him. Saw a cart full of children. Thought that work will save the ghetto.
- 2.21 Work in ghetto: Jews worked in the city. They had special permits. There was a factory for military wear and shoes. 1942 his father stopped working. In the factory they received soup. Sometimes potatoes. They made ladies shoes from rags.
- 2.30 Hunger: A was working in a kitchen. There was a strike because of conditions. The Gestapo took measures. Grandfather died. [Mother died in KZ in 1944.] A stole fruit. Received potatoes by special permission. There was ersatz - coffee. People fell on the street because of weakness.
- 2.39 Actions: There was shooting in the street. The KRIPO [criminal police] discovered hidden valuables. There was torture, people died. Found diamonds under floors. Radios were forbidden. But there were schools.
- 2.50 Information: Germans spread rumors of victories. They herd about Hess but did not believe. He learned English. There were ups and downs. Old sick and children were sent away. [INTERRUPTION] He has not heard about Auschwitz, or Warsaw revolt. Communications with Warsaw ceased.
- 3.46 Sickness: Had swollen feel, diarrhea, but overcame. Also, parents were sick. Apparently there was medicine. A physician treated them [he lied and was killed]. They smuggled in flour.
- 3.11 Events: The Jewish police had bad reputation. Conducted searches, arrests.

- 3.15 Private life: Knew a secretary of ghetto and manager of kitchen. A's wife born 1935, he married 1953. She did not understand him. He remembers some. Had deficiency of protein and got sick. Was swollen from hunger.
- 3.22 End of ghetto: Remembers the end of Russian bombs. Centralized people. Were given bread and jam. Grandmother died after 24 hours. By train to Auschwitz. Very crowded.
- 3.29 Auschwitz: There were 2 selections. Claimed to be locksmith. He was a slim boy and passed. Made to break a prison. [?]
- 3.32 Therapy after war: Underwent psychiatric therapy.
- 3.35 Auschwitz: People were awakened at night. Beat ups. Appels. Cold. Naked. Took workers from industry, locksmiths. They knew about crematorium. Food was better than in ghetto. Did not know about family. Did not know about nephew. Lice. Smoke in chimneys 24 hours. For 2 1/2 weeks did not suffer personally. Slept on floor. People came from Lodz. Quarrels. Thefts. Poles in block: criminals. Did not work. Did not remember what was going on. Know generally what Germans were doing. There was no time to mourn people.

II

- 4.00 Introduction: Because of years of fear in the ghetto until 1944 of beatings and selections - he was hospitalized 6 weeks. Was asked how the Germans succeeded to subvert.
- 4.46 Auschwitz: Identification with enemy. Took laborers to Germany. His father and 500 others were taken to Braunschweig [Bigging?] to work 8 months until 1945 in factory, assembling work.
- 4.10 Braunschweig: 12 hours a day he worked. 3 shifts. [After war he wrote to them asking reparation. Case is in court.] He was 16 years old. Worked on washing machines. Germans were ok. One hinted that he was anti-Nazi. His daughter was married to an officer at Auschwitz. There was selection and fear. But the _____ commander was decent: managed them and indicated that war will end.
- 4.13 Conditions in camp: There were alarms. Had to go to shelter at night. Their factory was target for bombs. The city was destroyed. The factory damaged. They worked 7 days a week. Food was soup. Washing with soap and rags. Slept in twos in room in the factory. But he was hungry and fearful.
- 4.39 Information: There was news about war: awareness that it was to end soon. But feared they would be killed then.
- 4.43 Transfer to Wagenstadt: Because of damage, they were transferred to Wagenstadt. He met people from Israel. He was building bunkers. Ate soup. At Goering's. Works. Frequently had to go to shelters, the prisons attacked for food. His father was weak, sick, and died.

- 4.50 Ravensbruck: Was taken by train to Ravensbruck [women's camp]. It was far from the front. There were empty barracks. Had dysentery and pain, but there was no treatment. There was mishandling, but they had hope.
- 4.59 Interruption: Beginning of the end: They were told that camp is under Red Cross supervision [Swedish]. They received parcels with meat and milk. They ate much and became sick.
- 5.10 Prisoner' Exchange: They were told they would be exchanged for German prisoners, and freed, Were taken to no-man's land by train for 8 days. There was here a Jewish representative. They sang 'Hatikvah' with Germans at attention. But liberation was cancelled. By train to camp Simdwogshust[?]
- 5.14 Sundwigslust: Slept on the floor. Ukrainian guards. They were bad. Several weeks with no work. Guards left and came back. They heard that Roosevelt died. They were told that they would be freed soon. Guards took Jews and wanted to kill them. But some prisoner guys did not let them in.
- 5.21 Liberation: The Germans disappeared. They saw an American tank. They took food. The Americans gave the food, but did not understand what was going on. He was taken to hospital and then went to the city. He was alone. Did not know what to do. So he took a cart and horse to go to Poland.
- 5.31 After liberation: He was dressed in German uniform. Took cart to go to Poland. Was topped by a Russian. They told him that they were Jewish. The Russian took him to their Jewish commander. Gave them potatoes and let them go.
- 5.35 Lodz: They went to Lodz. Met members of his family. Did not go to ghetto. A cousin of his father received him There was a place to register and he left his name there. The cousin gave him noey and he went to kibbutz 'Achdict' of the Hashomer Hatzair.
- 5.40 Kibbutz Achdict: Was told to work. There were counselors[?] from Palestine. He did not tell them what happened to him. They were 5-10 years older. There were almost members of the Jewish Brigade.
- 5.50 Camp Waldorf: He was taken to Schlozien - Germany to Kibbutz Waldorf. He worked on the field. Read books. They lived in a big house on the farm with 25 members of the Hashomer Hatzair.
- 5.54 Back to normalcy - Balchenburg. Slowly they normalized and wanted to go to Israel [1946]. They lived in Balchenburg, received documents: a false Red Cross identity. He was called 'Melech Chai'. A member of the Jewish Brigade took charge. They went by train to the Czech border and met the ambassador.

Interruption.

- 6.00 Hirschstadt: At the border at Hirschstadt they were stopped by a Polish officer who wanted to send them to Warsaw by train. But at the first station they left the train and traveled to Prague.

- 6.09 Austria: From Prague they went to Vienna. They received parcels from UNWRA. A group of Jews, with A among them were arrested by an antisemitic officer. They were let go but expelled from Austria. So they went to Italy.
- 6.19 Italy - Israel: There he joined a boat and left. The boat was caught in a storm but finally reached Israel. They were received and taken to the beach. But suddenly were caught on the beach by British soldiers and taken to Ashdod. The olim burned their documents and were taken to Haifa. The Jewish Agency knew that the British wanted to get out of this crisis. They gave them information about the country and when the British asked questions about their origin, A knew what to answer and they were freed.
- 6.44 Givat Bremer[?]: They went to Kibbutz Givat Bremer. To work and learn. In 1948 A joined the IDF, Signal Corps.
- 6.46 Ramat Chen: A felt there was alienation. He worked in a bank, but was closed up. He received psychiatric help at Ramat Chen. They tried to help. He misbehaved. Slowly he improved.

III

- 7.00 His health: 1946 was examined - Italy. His physical health was good. His psychological health was of no interest. But his psychological state deteriorated: tension, irritability. He did not tell his tale.
- 7.06 Ramat Chen: Met a person to whom he told his problems who helped to get therapy for him at Ramat Chen. He had fears and could not describe his state. There they performed tests and examinations. His wife knew what the situation was. The hardest problems: Action involving children. This was in his subconscious mind. Braunschweig had no influence. When after the war political relations with Germany improved - he suffered. Future generations will forget. Therefore the documentation is important. The visit of the German chancellor had little effect.
- 7.24 Eichmann trial: Was very important for him. A turning point: he realized he was not the only one who suffered. It is not possible to free oneself of the war experiences. The trial was a psychic breaking point for him.
- 7.28 After the trial: He could not speak about his experience with others. It took several days to get details [no TV], but he read all about it. Realized there was common trouble which will not pass. Attended a conference of Lodz survivors. Was much improved.
- 7.37 Present condition: Today he does not want to be a 'loser'. Therefore he does not talk about his experiences. His children did not know about them.
- 7.39 Therapy: He could not remember and thought about hypnotism. Demanded therapy. Was provided all kinds of pills. He talked about the Holocaust but was first not hospitalized. He was depressed. Had conversations with Dr. Brill. Had a day in hospital after he told him some stories. They concentrated on his stories involving children. He thought of suicide and attempted it. Then was 3 months in hospital. In 1949 he was

member of group, but did not speak much. He felt that the staff cared about him. His doctor did not convince him, but told him that he does not want to see him as an invalid in a wheel chair. He does not remember much. But he remained in follow up twice a year. They let him draw, which helped him.

- 8:01 He feels it would have been better if he told his story earlier. It is not like a sickness that passes. He changed physicians to a younger one: Dr. Yaffe. He wanted to work less. Dr wanted him to work more. Since age 58 he was retired. Could not stand stress in bank. Also, he has sick legs. He was in hospital, intensive care. Received artificial breathing and had hard time. His legs got infected. Since then his legs are weak. Twice a year he has follow up therapy. His dreams about gas chambers. He had fears in 1967 - during the 6 Day War and in 1973 the Yom Kippur war. Past experiences had less effect at the time than today. While a soldier with IDF had normal fears [his rifle should be clean, etc.] He had first wife in 1961, then girl friends after his divorce. Then he married again and has children and grandchildren.
- 8.42 End: It would have been better to come up with his story earlier.