

RG-50.120\*0249 2 Tapes  
SHMUEL GIVONY

1.00 Born Tibor Salomon [Slovak name] in Bratislava, Slovakia, June 30 1923. Parents had dry goods store. Belonged to status quo liberal reform congregation, went to Slovakia school and high school. One older sister. Joined swimming club, Bar Kochba. Most titles were by Jews. He had gentile friends.

Did Jews know? Hitler's famous speech, father took seriously and told them they had to leave. Older sister left for England to become a nurse, and thus survived. In 1939 he joined Hashomer Hatzair after Bar Kochba. Edgar Ziegler and Rudi Meyer were the counselors, about a year.

1.06 First decess concerning Jews. Father thought he should study plumbing and water installation as a profession, in preparation for Israel.

1.07 Father died in 1939. He worked for a local plumber - lived in their beautiful apartment, in an elegant part of town: housekeepers, cook and nannies. Still owned their store. Store was open on Saturday - they were traditional but not orthodox.

1.09 Helped mother in store after father's death. Stopped plumbing. Jews who had no profession had to consent to work camp - to build roads - 3 months. Describes different projects at work camp. Draining swamps, digging tunnels. Describes life - watched by Slovakian SS troops – anti-Semites. Recognized among them a father of an old school friend who ignored him. Stayed their approximately 4 months.

1.16 Aryanization of Jewish business - store was taken away. Broke his mother's heart. Went to a Jewish work colony for professional skilled plumbers. Describes co-workers, liked his work - still had Saturdays off.

1.18 Apartment was given to a German writer, young couple. 1941-42 mother moved out to live with sister-in-law. Gave many items from apartment to 2 neighbors. Laws against Jews kept increasing.

1.20 Survivors of Hashomer Hatzair group: George Feller, professor at Technion; Tuvia Rivner, poet - kibbutz Merhavia. Still writes to Rudi Meyer, who lives in Germany.

1.24 Bar Kochba reunion of swim team. The champions had passports - could travel and were saved: Eli Baron lives today in Naharia. Erika Feyer [Zonar] lives in Haifa.

1.25 Spring 1942. Did Jews know? Simcha Waldner, a girl friend. Jewish girls were called up. Scream of women leaving Slovakia - suggested transport to Hungary. Did you know about Poland, etc? Heard stories. This girl died in Auschwitz.

1.30 Remembers a day when war broke, Sept. 1941. They saw German soldiers 'on the way to Moscow', they said.

- 1.32 Found out most of the girls in transport perished in Auschwitz.
- 1.33 Describes clashes especially with German minority in Bratislava. Severed relations with Czech and Slovak friends.
- 1.35 Describes the transport center, as a plumber gave saws for chairs and other means of escape. Transporting of 1,000 people at a time. Then collected again for next transport.
- 1.38 Mother was in danger of transport. Wealthy uncle hid her. Still had passes to go see his mother. Mother had to leave hiding place. He took his mother with him. Camp Jewish leader took mother to women's barracks. Mother couldn't live there - they found a deserted house in Bratislava, smuggled her out over the fence.
- 1.44 Living conditions in camp. Many changes, when there was a small group of skilled workers, lived in own building. When transports started, describes sadistic guards.
- 1.46 Describes Jewish police and their relations with Slovak guards.
- 1.48 Fascist government started a furniture factory for show. Workers used these work centers to save Jews from transports, make them essential for projects. Became foreman of plumbing unit. As such, he could come and go and could recommend old friends - some stayed in the field and live in Israel or the US. Had tools for forgeries, other tools.
- 1.57 Escapes from the camp. People knew it was the end of the road. Describes the despair in the barracks of the condemned.
- 2.01 Autumn, 1942. Last transport Yom Kippur 1942. Quota of 1000 people couldn't be met so Germans decided to fill it with camp inmates - 400 extra were needed. Describes lines of inmates waiting for transport - cases of suicide of entire families.
- 2.05 Describes life in barracks - had school for children; Jewish clinic/hospital became social and information center, 20 miles from Bratislava. Used to meet in boiler room and exchange news and contacts.
- 2.10 Relations with Slovak guards - new commandant was bribed with money and liquor, but was more lenient. Used to bring Shmuel homemade sandwiches. Appreciated his skills. Gave him more liberties and passes.
- 2.15 Returns to the Yom Kippur transport - remembered entire families, young and old. None of them survived.
- 2.17 Remembers Mrs. Kunstler who headed the kitchen - survived, and died in Haifa, Israel at age 90.

- 2.19 The young group of professional plumbers moved together to their own building - even built their own swimming pool. Had their own commune. People became complacent and believed the worst for them was over. Shmuel did not. All members of this commune survived and stayed in close touch through the years.
- 2.24 Planned forged papers, planning for German army invasion. End of 1942 - had a radio, heard of Stalingrad and the Russian front. Planned escape routes, purchased weapons.
- 2.30 Contact with communist party members. Some of them fought in the Spanish civil war. Helped them purchase weapons. Had to learn to use their weapons. Continued to plan escape in the event of German takeover of Slovakia. Foresight and preparations led to their survival. Hashomer Hatzair and Young Maccabees joined hands.
- 2.38 Voted to join uprising, if and when it will happen, and join partisans. Most felt as youngsters they were still masters of their own fate.
- 2.40 News filtering from the front. Decided to leave camp - some wanted to join Tito and partisans and resistance in Hungary and Yugoslavia. Others would go to the mountains - join resistance there. Started to prepare bunkers. As skilled metal workers and handymen -plumbers, etc. - were still employed all over. Different building projects, including remodeling monasteries, mansions, hotels and spas.
- 2.50 German morale is changing. It's after Stalingrad and debacle of Eastern front. Slovaks also begin to worry about their future. Plans for escape to Hungary begin to take shape.
- 2.56 Still had freedom of movement. 'Have tool kit - will travel'. Heard of extermination camps in Poland. This is end of 1944.
- 3.00 Back to description of camp - school, kindergarten, even dental clinic. Laundry, etc. Compares the camp to a 'model ghetto'. Still feeling compacency. Still had plays, choruses, games with guards, etc.
- 3.08 His friend Akiva wrote a dissertation on work camp in Slovakia. Survival was based on real camaraderie.
- 3.10 Shmuel was ordered to go to Hungary. Described crossing border at night, hiding in a small rural synagogue. Congregation purchased tickets for train to Budapest. Shmuel had forged ID papers. Reached Budapest after 2 years in camp. The big city! Had an uncle and cousins there. Autumn of 1943. Welcomed by his relatives but couldn't stay there.
- 3.20 Hungarian Jews mostly did not believe the horror stories.
- 3.30 Talks of friends - moved in small groups. He felt like he was 'on vacation from the war' while in Budapest. When Germans entered the city, he had to leave Hungary. Managed

to cross border. Got job again as plumber. Jewish workers mixing with gentile laborers, all using forged papers.

- 3.40 Police caught up with them - had to flee again westward. Some went back to Slovakia, some joined partisans.
- 3.46 Givony went to Piestany while his friend, Akiva, went back to the work camp Sered where they met. Camp was liberated by partisans. Most inmates managed to flee before Germans arrived. Many survived the war because of this. Those who stayed were rounded up by Germans and perished.
- 3.56 On Czech border he joined the Czech army and went to the front.
- 4.06 Describes military escapades, German ambushes, etc. Escaped from German onslaught into a small village, Bukonets [sp?]. Slovak resistance was crushed.
- 4.10 Decided they had to join only partisans. Slovakian army dissolved entirely.
- 4.15 Describes life in the woods - Jewish refugees, Russia, German and Slovak bandits. Tales of rescue.
- 4.23 Decided to return to Bratislava. His friend Akiva was recognized and stopped by Gestapo, but managed to escape. Shmuel got a job as a welder in a factory.
- 4.30 Met his mother for first time in two years.
- 4.32 Describes joining the underground of Young Maccabees, financed by Swiss philanthropic diplomat/financier.
- 4.37 Shmuel was captured by Germans. Investigated by the local Gestapo chief, his sister's former German teacher.
- 4.42 Was sent back to camp in Sered for transport, but German commander needed him as bomb detonator and he was sent back to Bratislava with a group. Shmuel got forged papers again and prepared for escape.
- 4.51 Shows forged papers he had hidden in gloves - those saved his life together with different permits. Again he is sent to camp in Sered. Was employed again as welder for German army.
- 4.55 German morale very low. Soviet army bombardments getting closer - more frequent. Commander sent him on transport to Theresienstadt.
- 5.00 In Moravia they escaped from train. A young Czech gave them 100 marks and showed them the way to freedom - into the woods on the border.

- 5.05 Crossed border and are back in Slovakia - 'back home'... could be shot by either Germans or Russians. Found themselves in a valley in middle of Front and battle between German and Russian forces. Hid on a farm.
- 5.12 Then continued to Bratislava which fell to the Soviet army - description of rapes, executions and a rampage in the Capital. Their old German neighbor welcomes him [scared of the Soviets]. Another old neighbor had retrieved his family photos.
- 5.16 Found out his mother's hiding place was discovered and she was sent to camp in Ravensbruck where she died. His sister now lives in Germany.
- 5.18 Went to Palestine in 1947. Was leader and teacher of a youth group. 9 months in Belgium and 3 months in Cyprus. The kids all went to Kibbutz Dan.
- 5.20 Epilogue: 'One day in Auschwitz required more courage and strength than my entire war experience in Slovakia'.