

MOSHE KRAVITZ (RG.50 * 120 * 0272)

(Start Tape 1)

1:00 to 1:06

Family Background: He was born in Kovno in 1931, to middle class parents, with a brother 6 years older. Went to Hebrew-speaking school ("Schwabe") which became Yiddish when the Russians entered in 1940. Describes a content childhood, with parents not very religious, not communists nor Zionists. Did not experience anti-Semitism. Extended family in Vilna. Does not recall special events.

1:11 to 1:19

War Outbreak Started June '41 with the Germans' entry. Describes their escape on bikes towards the Russian border and return after 3 weeks. Their apartment occupied by Germans, moved finally in the Ghetto area..

1:20 to 1:50

Life in Kovno Ghetto. Describes their family life, work and schooling there. Limited living space shared with neighbors. Parents worried; but he does not recall hunger or extreme suffering at that time. Spent three years in the Ghetto. Described father's work, his own vocational schooling and training as blacksmith. Hidden money helped family. Ghetto became more like concentration camp after the two 'Aktzien'. The first was Yom Kippur (Oct' 43) he hid in closet.. Second 'Akzia' he left with parents, while brother, oldest neighbor daughter and friends all hid in the bunker (which brother and friends had been digging in their yard for a while) All those in bunker burned and perished, as he found out much later.

1:51 to 2:27

Other camps. They were taken from Ghetto (during bombing) on July 12 by train to Germany. Separated from women, on the way, i.e. his mother. He and his father arrived July 17 in **Landsburg**, which was a 'terrible world' compared the Ghetto. After three days there he (with 130 youngsters were separated from the men and shipped by truck to **Dachau**, (father died of exhaustion in Landsburg, he found out later) where he spent 6 days. Describes and compares experiences. Has become more religiously observant, with a group of other young men..

2:28 to 2:53

Move to Birkenau Describes the 3-4 day trip, expecting to die, hellish arrival, chimneys' smoke, wondering why they survived. Describes their 'cleansing' procedures, the barracks and their populations, routines, food and sickness. They received prisoner numbers after 7 days. Describes how they spent their days (no work); camp inmates: Jews from the Island Rhodes, people starving to death, criminals ruling the camp. He comments on older inmates suffering more than young ones.

2:54 to 3:04

Selections: describes two (New Year and Yom Kippur). Mengele appeared in the first and took 30-40 of the smaller children. ones. He responded to Mengele's question that he was 15 and was spared..

Second 'Selection' was determined by height. He saved himself by stuffing his shoes with cloth to appear taller. Forty of the 130 youngsters remained.

3:05 to 3:22

He was transported, with 25 youth, to an **agricultural farm** ("Dora"?) about 90 KM from Auschwitz. Survived the terrible freezing winter of '44/'45 by working indoors in the smithy. Women prisoners were there too, separately. Developed a supportive relationship with a French engineer prisoner, yet describes his loneliness and withdrawn existence there.

3:23 to 3:29..

The Walk to Buchenwald As the front approached he and many from other camps were marched (January 17, 1945 towards Buchewald, for two-and one-half days (about 120 KM), then packed into open train cars. He describes the cruelty of the German guards and the terrible cold, both causing many deaths.

3:30 to 3:41

Buchewald, Sickness and Liberation He reached Buchenwald physically depleted and emotionally exhausted. Describes trying to survive in this 'brutal, crazy place. In April the camp's Jews were rounded up. He hid in a pipe. Emerged sick with Typhoid and was sent to the 'barracks of the dead'.

The next day the camp was liberated by the allies..

3:42 to 4:00 (end tape 1/2)

Recuperation Describes being sent to the hospital, with a "real bed" and 'controlled food' regime. He was alone, emaciated and withdrawn, not fully aware of his surrounding

Red Cross handling. He was transferred to Switzerland to a children's sanatorium for Tuberculosis treatment with 8 others, where he stayed six months.. Recovered slowly. A teacher there helped them 'get back to civilization'.

4:00 (start tape 2/2) to 5:00

Additions, corrections and comments recalled after earlier testimonies:

- The ghetto was actually a terrible place (even though later camps were worse)
- Recalls family visits to Vilna with assorted relatives.
- During the Russian occupation, they were worried that as a 'bourgeois' family, they might be deported to Siberia.

Treasure of family documents and photos, which were hidden earlier in the Ghetto (later retrieved) are now in his possession. **Shows assorted childhood photos.**

- Tells how the youngest of their Ghetto neighbor family found the charred bodies of her older sister and his brother.
- Birkenau --- brutal beating
- Buchenwald -- bed sores/wounds from sleeping on bare wood.
- Poems and essays he wrote as an 11 year old , even though he did not observe all events directly. **Reads poems and essay** (translates from Yiddish).
- Additional recollection of working conditions in the ghetto. Compared ghettos, topic of revenge, “children’s brigade” (from his ‘October ’42 writings)

5:00 to 5:20

Continued Reading from his own 1942-1943 writings, (many poems, translates from Yiddish) topics include :”childrens’ brigade”; 200 children applying for work permits/tickets, “only money gets you things” Margolis overseas their work, walking to Landsburg, mud everywhere.

5:20 to

Speculates on Why He Wrote and Kept These writings , reads much of this for the first time in years and realizes it is the source of details he had mentioned during his testimony on the first tape

5:27 to 5:47

Further readings, which he wrote as a 15-16 year old after arriving in in Palestine (1946/7)

These include additions to and elaborations on earlier topics : Landsburg, , daily schedule and living arrangements in Dachau, Father’s hardships, Birkenau. (told re Aushwitz). (Reads, now for the first time, also details regarding their brief return to Kovno,. the bunker and the ‘Aktzia before going to the Ghetto)..

5:48 to 6:04

Recovery in Switzerland and Reconnecting with Mother . The Central Committee for Liberated Jews informed him (March ’46, responding to his inquiry) that his mother was in Kovno. He established writing contact with her, in line with his years of solitude and self-sufficiency, though she expected more. He attempted to get more training while at the sanatorium and further strengthened his Zionist desire to go to Palestine, eventually was given certificate to immigrate there in 1946.

6:05 to 6:38

Years in Palestine/Israel. Describes his early years as member of the Youth Aliyah, Mikveh Israel Agricultural School, joining the youth Hagana organization and in 1948 served two years in the Israeli army.

Trained in mechanics in Safed. Was a ‘loner’ -- had no ‘Real Home’ since he was 13 years old. does not know whether that was the outcome of his Holocaust experiences or

his nature. Got a job with the Ministry of Agriculture, got married and brought his mother to Israel.

Describes difficult relationship with his mother who seemed to need him more than he needed her. But he helped her in all possible ways.

6:39 to end of tape 2

Thoughts about the Holocaust were stimulated by these 'testimony' interviews. Also by the recent losses of his mother's and later his wife's death. Furthermore, during the last 5-6 years, he has been negotiating for reparation payments for his Holocaust-related disabilities, and these negotiations have turned into a painful and humiliating experience. He is thinking now about going back and reviewing his old writings (regardless of this interview) to examine what he experienced and wrote at age 11 and then at 16-17. to find out what was true -- or not -- and why. "Every year more people recall more and more things which did not happen".