

Interview of EFRAIM FISHMAN
September 2006
Translated by Hava Bonne

1:00-1:08

Background

He was born in Dubrovitsa, Poland, in 1922. Oldest of 5 children to a modest family with a cattle-trading father. Attended "Tarbut" school, but at age 13 moved to Rovna to attend gymnasium. He excelled in his studies (especially speaking many languages); and became self-supporting by teaching his fellow students, and practically independent from his family whom he visited only during holidays. In 1939, the Russians took over the schools, canceling Hebrew, thus limiting his teaching, and he had to live in the Gymnasium.

1:08-1:30

War Outbreak

At the time of his graduation in June 1941, the Russians left town and the Germans were at the border. Attempted escapes failed because of his sickness as well as the Germans' advances. He was told, by Ukrainians – and partly witnessed – Germans and Ukrainians torturing Jews from surrounding areas. Thus he returned to Rovna. There followed a period of assorted forced labor (Zwangsarbeit) for the Germans, and association with various Polish households (in return for teaching their children). Once he heard that he "looks like a gentile," he decided to cover up his Jewish identity, and survived on assorted false papers, aided by his multi-language skills. "Antonia" – the Polish woman who took him in provided him with refuge and subsequently with the false papers and the Arbeitskarte (work permit), thus saving him from the fate of the Jews who were taken to "Aktzia" (whose screams and being killed he witnessed). He stayed partly hidden in her attic, partly working in the fields, for several months, pretending to be a Polish discharged prisoner/soldier (name: Beleslav Isdepski). All remaining Jews were sent to the still open ghetto (Nov. 41)

1:30 – 2:00

Blank

2:00-2:30

Ghetto, Kovel and other places

In the Ghetto he was advised by a Judenrat member he'd be better off elsewhere with his papers. He went to Kovel (March 1942). Some suspicions arose. Describes living close to German headquarters with Jew-sniffing dog, which he managed to evade because he lived "under their nose."

He worked in a train station for a German (cattle-transport) company, with multi-national employees as translator. Was able to send message to family in Dubrovitsa and actually saw his father and visited Christmas

day. Took his sisters to Polish families – one survived – her story later). By April 1942, non-working Jews were liquidated and ghetto was sealed. He rewarded his saving families with valuables from his family home. Back in Kovel, continued to work disguised as a Pole.

2:30-3:00 Blank.

3:00-3:30 Describes his work with the German cattle-transport company and some of its benefits: e.g., being able to hoard large amounts of sugar carried on the train – extremely valuable as exchange for food and other necessities; being able to issue blank “travel documents” which were subsequently used to save others; helping the partisans by informing them regarding train schedules so they could “help themselves” to cattle. When suspicions arose, he chose to disappear and spent time in and between trains, criss-crossing wide areas: Among them Rovno, Kovel, Kiev (where he spent all 1943 winter), Dnepropetrovsk, Nikolayev, Krim (Crimea) (where his wounded eye was treated). Subsequently, he joined soldiers with armbands “im Dienst der Wehrmacht” (at the service of the Wehrmacht) posing as Miller, a German discharged soldier whose papers he stole on a train), and managed to find work in German air force work battalion);

3:30-4:00 Blank

4:00-4:30 Recruited to Odessa to work for giant aircraft preparation (was able to read/interpret plans). Describes multi-national workers.

War's End

With the beginning of the Germans' retreat (April 1944), he and 19 Polish workers escaped to hide in nearby catacombs and sewage. They had to explode the train locomotive to prove their loyalty to the partisans who helped them. He returned to Odessa and when the Russians came proved to the officers he was not German but Jewish. Recruited as Pole into Polish troop and was sent for training to Kharkov and Lutsk till November 1944. Explains how he was able to conceal his identity most of the time. Claims Poles were more aware/suspicious re his Jewishness than Germans.

4:30-5:00 Blank

5:00-5:30 In the Polish Army

Received officer training near Lutsk (summer 1944) and describes his adjustment and moves to Warsaw, Poznan, Kohlberg, Stettin and the Oder river, until the Berlin surrender. Left the Polish Army when he found out about the Kielce massacre of Jews (Stationed in Lublin and Chelm)

Connecting with family

Describes how he managed to discover and reconnect with his brother Joseph who was in the Russian Army (and sister who escaped to Russia.) Brother gave him Russian soldier's papers and both moved to Vienna.

Move to Vienna (spent 2 ½ years there)

Returning to his Jewish identity, he joined Refugee Organization and participated in organizing a Hebrew transition school (for young refugees planning to make aliyah) where he taught Hebrew and studied, as did his brother. He also met his future wife there.

Move to Palestine/Israel

In 1947 he immigrated to Palestine, joined the Palmach, and after the establishment of the State, fought in the Israeli Army during the War of Independence. Subsequently he became a teacher of many subjects and eventually the principal of the Educational Center in Tel Aviv for 25 years.

5:30-6:00 Blank (end of tape 1)

6:00-6:30 (start of tape 2) **assorted documents and photos:**
A) Memorial volume relating to Dubrovica
B) Family photos
C) "Tarbut" school photos
D) Dismantling the roof of his home.

6:30-7:00 Blank

7:00-7:30 (end of tape 2) **Story of how his sister was saved**
Both he and his sister were saved in 1942 by Antonia and her daughter (one sister perished). She was taken by partisans and subsequently transferred to Russia. When he and his brother reunited in Vienna (in 1947), they traveled to Moscow to visit her. She was adopted by Ilya Ehrenburg's family and was written about later. Reconnected with her only in 1970.

More photos:

From his period in the Polish army, (which he left following Kielce pogrom). Also of himself and brother in uniform; also of activities and people from his school teaching in Vienna.