

Rais, Jaffa
RG – 50.120*0316
Three Video Cassettes
In Hebrew

- Abstract:** Jaffa Rais was born in 1923 in Belzec, a small town near Lublin. Before the war, Jaffa describes having a happy childhood. She describes her own work on a Ukrainian farm and the contacts, visits and the help from people on Krasnik to those in Budzyn. In February 1944 after nine months, Jaffa was transported to Budzyn I (Arbeitslager) and Budzyn II (KZ). She compares the two and describes the transfer. She describes leaving Budzyn to Majdanek on foot and how her family managed and their march from Majdanek to Auschwitz. She describes leaving Auschwitz for Bergen-Belsen. After the war, she was in a DP camp. She married Avraham in 1946 and in January 1949 they went illegally on a boat to Israel.
- 1:00 to 1:30** Jaffa Rais was born in 1923 in Belzec, a small town near Lublin, where 50% of the population was Jewish. She was the first born and had three younger siblings. She describes the Tarbut Hebrew School and other schools she attended. She describes her family as being comfortable financially. She had many relatives. Her father's lumber work in a nearby village was near the train station and there they also spent their summers. Jaffa's family was traditional, Zionist, and spoke Yiddish at home. They were active in the Jewish community. Her family had almost no contact with the Polish population. Overall she summarizes that she had a "happy, satisfied childhood."
- 2:00 to 2:18** Between 1936-1939, Jaffa attended a Jewish high school in Lublin. She was a good student and learned Polish. However, she missed her hometown. She felt that she hardly knew what happened in Germany as her family contacts were mostly with Israel. She was not aware of refugees. However she started sensing something in the last summer before the war.
- 2:19 to 2:30** Jaffa describes the defeat of the Polish Army, bombings and the German army entering and temporarily settling in the school at the end of her street. She describes her fears and rumors, the daily restrictions and the curfew. She states that there was a lot of stealing of merchandize and humiliation of people.
- 3:00 to 3:11** Jaffa describes the Germans looting her family's valuables (most residents constructed hiding places in their houses). They also

hid their food. She describes how Jews were caught to clean snow from the streets. Some young people went east to Russia. Refugees gathered in their town from surrounding areas. The community was responsive to the needy and set up a public kitchen and heated place. The main organizer of the public assistance was Goldstein. Then there was a typhoid epidemic.

3:12 to 3:30

Jaffa describes how she herself became more fearful and insecure but at the same time took more responsibility as the oldest child in her family. She describes how her father changed. They were unable even to try to escape to Russia and she was unable to pretend that she was Polish. In 1941, Jaffa heard about Majdanek for the first time. She describes the daily risks that were taken for survival, such as smuggling gold to Lublin, hiding jewelry in the basement, etc.

4:00 to 4:10

Jaffa describes everyday routines in town and being constantly fearful and watching out for Germans. She remembers packing necessities in knapsacks and hiding at neighbors or other hiding places, spending time in synagogue, at her grandparents, the curfews and constantly standing guard.

4:11 to 4:24

Jaffa describes the first Aktzia, her Lublin cousin Miriam being taken and hearing about Majdanek. She describes what she knew about the Judenrat in 1941. She describes hearing her friends and relatives being shot. Jaffa had heard about Sobibor and Belzec as places where Jews were caught to work for the Germans. Then she was given an Arbeitskarte, a work permit. She describes her own work on farms, for Poles and how she got food.

4:25 to 5:07

Jaffa tries to describe the German Jews and other refugees who came – via Lublin and Krakow – to their town (does not know why). She said every local Jewish family took some refugees into their homes and these refugees were not used to local habits (e.g. outdoor toilets).

5:08 to 5:30

The Aktzia started on Hosha'anah Rabah with random shootings by Germans; many townspeople escaped to the fields. Jaffa describes her own hiding place with her mother and sister. They were locked in, and apparently overlooked thanks to a bribed German soldier named Engel. Her father, cousin and others escaped to Lublin. It was a traumatic experience. Jaffa describes the families, caring for her sick relatives, hearing soldiers knocking on walls, a young mother consenting to Dr. Flasser, giving her crying baby a lethal injection to save all those hiding from being discovered. Many were saved but rumors about the town's

imminent liquidation persisted. Poles told them that all those who were caught were taken to Majdanek.

6:00 to 6:30

Jaffa describes how they moved to an empty house in Belzec when her father returned. She remembers Jewish police at the gate. She worked at digging a road to the Majdanek train station. She describes Aktzia at the camp too, as well as hiding places. She describes ongoing activities in the camp such as weddings, evening gatherings, and contact with partisans. When asked why they did not leave, she states that she was “not strong enough to escape and live as a Pole.” Jaffa was told about murders in Sobibor by an eye witness. She describes her parents’ routines and her work. Life in Belzec was difficult but they were together. Liquidation came as a total surprise. She describes the final liquidation on May 8, 1943.

- 7:00 to 7:06 Jaffa describes life in the camp, food and cooking.
- 7:06 to 7:30 She describes the unexpected move, noise and turmoil of 20-30 women. Jaffa describes the cruel German commander named Fikes who demanded all valuables. Men hid in the synagogue. Later they had to dig graves for the many killed. She describes where various relatives went. She, with about 25 others, got on a carriage that went via Krasnik to Budzyn. Jaffa compares and discusses each of these places. She talks about German need for workers and how it was determined who was sent to these places. She knew that about 400-500 were killed before they left. She describes where some of her relatives went and how they managed with hidden money.
- 8:00 to 8:30 Jaffa continues to compare the different places to which she was taken. She felt that Krasnik was a better place and people there could help those sent to Budzyn. Her father went to Krasnik while she went with 30 others to Budzyn. She describes life in the women's block. She describes the discovery of her aunt's clothes. She describes the women's work, Apels, Stockman, and the Schreiber. Polish prisoners of war were their commanders and they were relatively decent. Regina was the commander in the women's camp. She describes her own work on a Ukrainian farm and the contacts, visits and the help from people in Krasnik to those in Budzyn. She states that the Whermacht guards were helpful, but those that tried to escape were killed. They were all afraid of Fikes.
- Jaffa describes daily life in Budzyn in the women's block. She states that they were supportive of each other and there was even some singing. She describes her laundry work and health issues. Jaffa was able to meet her boyfriend, Avraham, daily. She describes how the children managed (including her youngest brother). Regina was helpful.
- 9:00 to 9:30 Jaffa describes her meeting with her boyfriend and how that condition deteriorated due to hunger and the SS taking money from people. Taking people's money decreased after Fikes left. Jaffa details the fate of assorted inmates. She remembers being locked up while Lublin was liquidated in November. She describes the life of her family members, including sisters and their sleeping arrangements. She describes food and health. Women who worked for the SS faired better than the men. Jaffa describes life in general at the camp.

- 10:00 to 10:07 Jaffa describes daily life, relationships, couples, and how they still received food from Krasnik. They did not celebrate the holidays.
- 10:07 to 10:30 In February of 1944 after nine months, Jaffa was transported to Budzyn I (Arbeitslager) and then Budzyn II (KZ). She compares the two and describes the transfer. She states that she was beaten, but it was an easier regime. She notes that she could tell that the Germans were beginning to loose. There were many escape plans but she did not want to try to escape.
- 11:00 to 11:06 She describes leaving Budzyn to Majdanek on foot and how her family managed. They were the first Jews. She worked in a Laundromat in Majdanek from mid June to July 22. She describes the laundry work and feeling somewhat hopeful.
- 11:20to 11:30 She talks about leaving Majdaneck on foot, the Allies bombarding, hiding, and fires in Lublin. She states that there were heavy rains and they had to walk to Krasnik only to find that everyone had left.
- 12:00 to 12:12 Jaffa describes the march from Majdanek to Auschwitz. They were accompanied by SS men. She describes the march and its difficulties. She relates what happened to various family members who refused to escape. None of the others who tried to escape survived. She saw her father for the last time on a train.
- 12:12 to 12:30 Jaffa describes her arrival to Block 11 area A in Birkenau where they received clothes, showered, were numbered, had work instructions, all with masses of people. She was spared a head shaving and a selection, as explained by an SS officer, due to the need to be guarded. The SS managed to leave Majdanek before the Russians arrived. Jaffa remembers witnessing the arrival of other transports. She went to work daily with her mother. She had many fears but there were candles on Yom Kippur and it made her feel better. Altogether she spent six weeks there.
- 13:00 to 3:15 Jaffa describes a new Hungarian transport, and the children's block. She describes moving to various locations in Birkenau with different Blockelteste. They could smell the crematoria and guessed which transports would land there directly.
- 13:16 to 13:30 Jaffa describes leaving Auschwitz for Bergen-Belsen. She also describes selections by Mengele at the end of November and early December. On the next morning train two family members were selected. She saw them again only after liberation. After two days they arrived in Zeller, and marched on foot to Bergen-Belsen. She

describes arriving in a storm and seeing the tents swimming in water.

- 14:00 to 14:30 Jaffa describes everyday life - disinfection, struggling and competing for food, and knitting socks from frayed blankets. There was no work and greater desperation. Eventually she got a night shift in an airplane-parts factory in Raguhn, East Germany. She describes the continued struggle for food. They were not hit by bombs. She is sure that the local German population must have seen them on their daily return back to camp despite the subsequent denials. In all she spent six weeks in Raguhn.
- 15:00 to 15:22 Jaffa describes more about Raguhn, which was a bit better than Bergen-Belsen. But after Easter 1945 they were loaded into trains and went on a week of travel. They were not accepted at various stops. She remembers that Jewish women were taken to sleep with SS on the train. Jaffa remembers that there was a rumor about the end of the war. "Ich mochte in ihren Platz sein" (I would have liked to be in your place) one SS told her. Jaffa describes entry to Terezin, housing there and food. There was a typhoid epidemic that started on the train and they had little medical help. She and other family members became very sick, but a Czech doctor's shots saved her. Many were sick with dysentery and were unable to digest rich food.
- 15:22 to 15:30 Jaffa describes the entry of the Russians. They treated them well. The Russians told them about the end of the war. Jaffa was transferred to a hospital where she was quarantined and was very weak. She describes meeting some people from her hometown and searching for missing family members.
- 16:00 to 16:30 Jaffa tells a story about a bus load of children, including her young brothe, that were saved and located in a Lublin orphanage. The children were taken by train to Prague and lived in a monastery. They were well received and recovering at the end of May 1945. Jaffa describes emotional meeting with her brother and both sisters. She describes attempts to start life again with family, trading in clothes, food and money, trips to Belzec, her hometown and the family farm. In Menderwitch (?) they search for hidden valuables. They found some old acquaintances helpful, others not.
- 17:00 to 17:30 Describes meeting with some former workers in family business. Generally she was well received. They received part of the money owed by some of them (Salmanovisky.) She describes how they reconstructed life's necessities and made arrangements for duties such as cooking. She describes her unexpected and exciting

reunion with Avraham, her boyfriend. She describes how she found out her father did not survive and her reaction to that news. They prepared to gather all remaining family members in Lublin. They had both good and bad experiences trying to retrieve some old belongings and property. Jaffa describes deciding to leave Lublin and Poland in December of 1945.

18:00 to 18:30

Jaffe describes the entire family's trip to Berlin. Jaffa states that they had contacts with the Jewish community and received help from the JOINT, UNRRA. She learned and taught Hebrew. She did not have any contact with Germans. She went to a DP camp. She married Avraham in 1946 and in January 1949 went by an illegal immigration route on a boat to Israel. She describes it as a very difficult trip as she already had a seven-month old baby. She describes her arrival and how the entire family managed. She describes later years, family members' deaths and other events. She describes her 1988 trip to Poland, and how they told their stories to their children in later years.

By Hava Bonne