

Ben-Ozer, Moshe  
RG-50.120\*0318  
1 Videocassette  
In Hebrew

**Abstract:** Moshe Ben-Ozer was born in 1931 in Semeliskes, Lithuania. His father was a merchant and managed to support his family well. Moshe was the second youngest among seven siblings. He describes the ghetto's liquidation. The entire family left together on a train. On the way, the women were taken off at Stutthof and the men continued to Landsberg. Then Moshe and others were taken in trucks to Dachau. They were there for one week. Then they were all evacuated to Auschwitz/Birkenau by train. On liberation day, April 11, 1945, all the youth were gathered into one block (that belonged to the Germans) and they were fed. After the war, Moshe found his father and one sister. He stayed in Foehrenwald until 1948. Then, he moved to the Betar movement. He also joined the underground military movement, the Etzel and took an active part in obtaining weapons in Germany. Moshe underwent military training to prepare for his ultimate immigration to Israel in June of 1948.

**1:00:29** Moshe was born in 1931 in Semeliskes, Lithuania. His parents were Rachel and Ozer Grutzkys. Two years later they moved to Kovno, Slobodka. Moshe was one of seven children, six of whom were girls. His father was a merchant and managed to support his family well. He had a large souvenirs store in Semeliskes, and when they moved to Kovno, he manufactured matza before Passover and he also kept storage places in the central market in the wholesale section. He bought fruit and vegetables from the farmers in the outskirts of Kovno and sold them. He was active in the Jewish community in charity and all kinds of aid. Later on, in the ghetto, Moshe's father worked as a gardener for a Wehrmacht general. Since he was able to leave the ghetto, he managed to smuggle out a baby that had been born in the ghetto, and put him in the care of some Lithuanians. Both the parents and the baby survived and were reunited after the war. The "baby" now lives in New York and is a lawyer. Moshe was the next to the last among his siblings. His youngest sister was taken away, together with another sister, in the big "action" of Kovno and yet another sister perished in the ghetto bunkers, where she had hidden with others, when the Germans blew them up before the ghetto's liquidation. Three sisters survived the concentration camps.

**6:49** Moshe's extended family consisted of his paternal uncle, Ephraim and his paternal grandmother, Haya.

- 8:57 Moshe's family was observant. One of his surviving sisters, Masha, was active in the B'nai Akiva movement.
- 11:03 Their family was comfortable economically.
- 11:47 Moshe's father was remarkably optimistic. He believed they would survive the war (he did) and hoped the Germans would be defeated in some fashion. After education for Jews ended, Moshe's father took a private tutor for his son. The tutor was paid in kind, through meals and food. The same tutor prepared Moshe for his Bar-Mitzvah.
- 16:00 Moshe describes his school before the ghetto was established. He experienced anti-Semitism on the way to school. Early on Moshe decided the only place he would move to was Israel.
- 19:29 When the ghetto was liquidated, most of the surviving Kovno Jews arrived in Landsberg. After a short time they decided to remove the children, 131 of them, from that work camp to Dachau.
- 21:13 Since the ghetto was established in the area where Moshe lived, they stayed in their own home. When the ghetto was downsized the family had to move.
- 22:03 Moshe describes life before the ghetto, summers in Merkine.
- 24:40 Echoes of the war began when Polish refugees arrived. In 1941 Moshe's family decided to take a few belongings and fled towards the Russian border. They encounter the war as they fled. They saw German planes bombing Russian tanks. Moshe's family found shelter in a forest but eventually they were forced to go back to Kovno. Then the Germans entered Kovno. Now the Jews had to confront two enemies: the local Lithuanians and the Nazis.
- 29:58 Two of Moshe's sisters were married in the ghetto.
- 2:00:26 Moshe explains life in normal times in Kovno and in Slobodka.
- 10:00 Moshe describes his bar-Mitzvah in the ghetto.
- 11:00 Moshe's father's job while in the ghetto allowed him to bring more food to his family.
- 13:32 In one of the "actions" the family hid in a bunker under the house. They posted Moshe outside in order to mislead the Nazis and the Jewish police who collaborated with them. Moshe was beaten but didn't disclose the

hidden entrance to the bunker. Then, he managed to flee until quiet returned.

- 16:21 While in the “small ghetto” the children’s “action” took place. The children hid and this time, the adults stood and watched. Moshe was saved. After exiting the bunker they saw through the windows how the children who were caught were put on trucks: the Germans unleashed the dogs on the children. The dogs pushed the children towards the trucks.
- 20:00 Moshe names his sisters and explains how two sisters were married in the ghetto.
- 24:20 He describes the big “action”.
- 27:33 Moshe describes the ghetto’s liquidation. The entire family left together on a train. On the way, the women were taken off at Stutthof and the men continued to Landsberg.
- 28:38 The children, all male, were grouped there and sent to Dachau. After about a week, the 131 children were sent to Auschwitz.
- 3:00:20 In the ghetto, Moshe remembers that he studied mechanics, in addition to a short time spent in general studies.
- 2:33 Moshe describes Landsberg. They were taken in trucks to Dachau. They were there for a week. Then they were all evacuated to Auschwitz/Birkenau by train. On the way, two children jumped off the train. Moshe described his work there and the living conditions.
- 10:04 First “action” for Moshe in Birkenau was the one decreed by Mengele for Rosh Hashanah. Some of the children in the group were taken to the crematorium.
- 13:15 In the second “action” which took place on Yom Kippur, more children were taken. Moshe decided to look taller then by adding blanket pieces into his shoes. He wasn’t taken. He describes Mengele’s demeanor at the time.
- 15:59 Scarlet fever broke out in Moshe’s block and they were isolated in their bunks for a week.
- 17:39 Moshe talks about Belske, the spiritual leader of the children, who was a few years older than the rest of the children.
- 20:01 Some 40 children remained in the group after the two “actions.”

- 22:00 He describe his job of storing potatoes.
- 24:00 Moshe talks about winter clothing in the camp.
- 25:18 As the Russians approached Auschwitz and Birkenau, the Germans decided to evacuate the two camps. As they were leaving, by foot, Moshe lost his group. In the evening, they entered Auschwitz where they were for a couple of days. They started marching again and arrived at a train stations. After two to three travel days with no food or water, they arrived somewhere.
- 28:48 Many of the prisoners couldn't survive without food and water and many died.
- 29:53 Moshe talks about his arrival in Buchenwald.
- 4:00:30 Moshe arrived in Buchenwald after a very difficult trip. He was put in Block 66 with other youth. They were fenced in. There were beds for everyone and the attitude toward the youth was good. The person in charge of the block was a Czech political prisoner and his aide was a Jew. The youth worked outside the camp, cleaning the debris left after the American bombing of the city.
- 2:00 An interesting point: all the youth were taken to a dental clinic to care for their teeth and gums. A few times they also managed to get parcels from the Red Cross, with chocolates and other sweets. Moshe arrived in Buchenwald in January.
- 6:00 Moshe described the dead among the prisoners.
- 9:30 Political prisoners got administrative jobs.
- 10:55 Political prisoners were organized into the underground.
- 12:39 On liberation day, April 11, 1945, all the youth were gathered into one block (that belonged to the Germans) and they were fed.
- 13:05 When they saw the Americans approaching the camp, the political prisoners overtook the camp with the help of the guns they had collected (the watchtowers, the office at the entrance of the camp, etc). Then, the American tanks entered the camp. The former prisoners ate under the medical supervision of the Americans.
- 16:11 After two to three weeks when their strength returned, a group of youth organized themselves to go towards Poland and Lithuania in search of their relatives. They moved by all means of transportation: through

Dresden, and then to Lodz, Warsaw and Bialystok where he was in a youth hostel. There he found people who were making their way back from Kovno to Germany after not having found anyone alive. He asked one of those people, Mr. Birger, who knew Moshe's family, if anyone in his family survived. He said there was no one there. Moshe then decided to start the return trip to Germany. Back in Lodz, kibbutzin began to get organized through youth movements. Moshe didn't know any of the groups. He joined Dror and with two other children he was sent to Krakow, to a Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz. He was there for a few months with the Polish youth. Moshe describes the activities there.

- 27:00 He describes how they began to move toward Germany. They stopped first in Prague (after two to three months) to get fake certificates. Then Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad), and smuggled themselves into Germany. Together there were 40 to 50 youths. He details their arrival in Regensburg and then how they went by train to Munich.
- 5:00:22 While there, Moshe heard rumors that his father survived the war. They met in Munich! His father had been living in a DP camp near Munich, Feldafing. Moshe left the kibbutz and followed his father. In Feldafing he started a technical school. He found out that his two brothers-in-law had also survived. They also found out that three of his sisters had survived and had returned to Kovno.
- 7:12 Moshe's father then traveled to Kovno and managed to smuggle the two married daughters out of there. After a while, Moshe decided to go to live with one of his married sisters in Foehrenwald, while he continued to study in an ORT School.
- 9:21 Moshe's father stayed in Kovno with his other daughter. He took responsibility for the large synagogue there. He remarried. Moshe's other sister also got married there. They stayed there from 1945 to 1956. Moshe's father started an industry: wool production. The farmers would bring him the sheep wool and he, with the help of machinery he had bought, manufactured the skins. He would eventually sell it. Moshe's father managed to arrive in Israel in 1956 with Moshe's youngest sister. Her family of two boys left Kovno in 1972.
- 13:13 Moshe stayed in Foehrenwald until 1948. Then he joined Betar movement. He also joined the underground military movement, the Etzel, and took an active part in obtaining weapons in Germany. Moshe also underwent military training in preparation for his immigration to Israel.
- 17:37 One day, they were sent to Marseille to load the weapons onto ships and then they themselves boarded the ship. The name of the ship was the *Altalena*! After a week, they arrived on Israel's shores where they were

told to return to high seas (discussion where the ship was supposed to anchor). By evening of the next day they had brought the ship to the shore of Kefar Vitkin. They were told to leave their personal belongings on the ship until the next day. They were bussed to the immigration house in Ra'anana (there had been over 800 refugees on the boat). The next day, they started hearing rumors about the fate of the weapons. The Ra'anana group fled to Tel Aviv. They were sent to Kerem HaTemanim. The boat had arrived in the Tel Aviv shore. The group that was to protect the ship amounted to around 40 people. They were attacked (even after they raised the white flag) and also attacked the rest of the group in Tel Aviv. The ones conducting the attack served in the Palmach. Many were wounded. The attack continued in other places. The armed guards on the ship were ordered not to return fire on the attackers. Still, they kept on being attacked and sixteen or seventeen perished.

- 6:03:20 Moshe arrived in Israel on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 1948. They joined in the IDF on July 13, three weeks after their arrival. Moshe was under-age, but he beseeched before Dov Shilansky to allow him to enlist. This was after matters were settled between Haganah, Etzel and Lehi.
- 7:00 As happy as Moshe was on liberation day, the best day of his life was marching in the streets of Tel Aviv, wearing his IDF uniform, on the way to one of the northern operations. He felt proud that what he had experienced as a child growing up in Kovno, being screamed at “dirty Jew” he would never experience again.