

RG-50.120*0319
Rotshtein, Fishel
Two Videocassettes
Recorded January 9th, 1997
In Hebrew

Tape One

- 1:00:27 Fishel was born on November 11, 1917 in Lodz, Poland. There were eight children in the family. Fishel was the fifth among his siblings. His family was middle class. They did not lack anything. The oldest child was Shimon Joel, followed by his sister Raise, a brother Izik Leib, and another sister Freydl. They were all exterminated. After Fishel came two other sisters, Rachel and Fella, who did survive the Holocaust. The entire family was in the ghetto, where their original house was located. The oldest brother was in the Polish Army when the war broke out.
- 2:48 Their father was a butcher. All the children went to school. The oldest brothers finished high school and the oldest sister did as well. Fishel went to a trade school, and learned winery, until the age of 16. Their grandmother lived in the same building and he even remembers his great-grandmother. There was not a single Shabbat when the entire family did not dine at Grandmother's table.
- 4:11 Fishel discusses his extended family.
- 5:46 In Fishel's building, there were 70 children. Their synagogue was in the vicinity.
- 6:56 In a total population of 700,000, there were 250,000 Jews. There were also 100,000 Germans.
- 7:19 The industry was owned by both Jews and Germans. Most agriculture was held by Germans and Poles.
- 7:57 The stores were small. There were poor people too. Fishel's family employed two helpers in their house, one for the house work and the other to take care of the children. One of the helpers was Jewish. Mother helped in the store.
- 9:16 One of the sisters married before the war.
- 9:34 Fishel's was a traditional house. Father was a progressive Jew, less religious than his siblings.
- 17:00 When war broke out, Fishel's older brother who was in the Polish army, was in the area and he was taken by the Russians. He sent a letter home and told his family of his intentions to stay in Lemberg (Lviv).

- 18:41 Fishel describes when the Germans entered Lodz and the enactment of the Anti-Jewish laws.
- 24:52 Fishel's father, who had cancer, died before the beginning of the war. Their store was immediately closed. The ghetto was established and Fishel was there for six months.
- 29:25 Fishel describes the rationing of food once the ghetto was closed.
- 2:00:00 He describes cultural life in the ghetto.
- 10:16 He describes the service organization in the ghetto.
- 15:35 Description of the shops in the ghetto.
- 16:59 Punishment for smuggling goods into the ghetto.
- 3:00:58 An attempt to flee the ghetto ends in their return.
- 5:56 Fishel registers to go to work in Germany. They travel by passenger train to Braetz by Schwibus. The camp was practically desolate. There were only barracks and piles of bricks.
- 9:02 Describes the camp. It was winter. For a long time, they did nothing except for eating and for heating the barracks.
- 15:48 While there, Fishel contracted blood poisoning. He was taken to a hospital, operated on and lay there for a while. After he recovered, he stayed at the hospital and worked there. He stayed there for a month and a half.
- 18:43 Upon his return, Fishel saw that the camp had been liquidated and the people moved elsewhere. It was then April, and work paving a road was feasible. They worked hard.
- 21:03 He was there for five months, and was always in touch with his family who was still in the ghetto. Some of the money he earned went to them.
- 4:00:00 Fishel describes his relationship with his work manager.
- 17:00 Next winter, Fishel and his group worked for the local farmers.
- 20:04 Fishel learned to be a medic while at a camp in Grunau. He was there for six to seven months.
- 26:30 All the different camps that Fishel was in were established in order to build the Autostrade. He worked there until mid-1943.

- 5:04 Fishel discusses sexual intimacy between Jewish prisoners and the farmers' wives (whose husbands were at the front).
- 7:36 When the Autostrade was not considered essential any longer, 120 of the Jewish prisoners were sent to a weapons factory (ArdeWerke?). But Fishel and another inmate were put in charge of organizing the laundry operations. After the former medic chose to return to the ghetto, Fishel was put in his place. Fishel discusses different groups in the camp and their work habits.
- 7:45 He discusses special relationship with the French inmates.
- 11:12 Echoes of the Stalingrad defeat come to the group.
- 16:36 In August of 1943 they are sent to Auschwitz in passenger trains. There were about 200 young men. A letter came with them, testifying to the fact that these were workers who could be put to work right away. In a few hours, they were given work, shoes and bread. They were first in Birkenau, then in Auschwitz and Buna, for about a week. Describes the processing into the camp.
- Tape Two
- 7:00:00 Tells the story of the gold coins found in Birkenau.
- 7:33 Describes the I.G. Farben industry (refinery) in Buna and the work camp. He describes the work conditions, administration, and how an orchestra made up of inmates accompanied workers at gate.
- 16:20 Talks about trading coins for food in Buna.
- 22:10 Work in cement plates to use in air attacks.
- 26:04 Hangings were a common occurrence.
- 27:23 Sundays were delousing days and also for showering.
- 8:00:00 Talks about rashes and their treatments.
- 18:39 Conducting business, trading, bartering for food.
- 26:00 Punishment for being caught, if not death, was to help hang another inmate.
- 29:36 Although there were barracks for the inmates in Buna, Fishel was in one of two large tents. He describes the sudden building of a new barrack "deluxe."
- 9:00:00 Non-Jewish inmates were allowed and did get food parcels sent to the camp.

- 7:50 The barrack “deluxe” became a bordello, which inmates, non-Jewish, frequented to redeem the “coupons” they received for that purpose.
- 10:26 Describes the arrival of Jews from Holland and France.
- 11:23 When a visit by the Red Cross was announced, the inmates received down covers (which had been taken from the Dutch).
- 11:39 Describes the Red Cross visit.
- 20:54 An escape from the camp guaranteed a very long and protracted roll call until the camp was checked.
- 10:00:00 Describes the case of the six who ran away.
- 10:06 At the end of 1944, people from Lodz, arrived to Buna, after the ghetto was liquidated. Fishel received news from his family.
- 13:01 Beginning of Auschwitz liquidation. Strategy for taking as few belongings as possible. Talks about January 1945 and the Russian approach.
- 18:10 Fishel stopped in Gleiwitz after marching in the snow. They were put in open trains. They were all thirsty and drank from the snow.
- 22:26 Describes arrival in Prague where they manage to get some bread after days of hunger.
- 26:26 Arrival in Buchenwald.
- 28:28 After a week or two, a transport was sent to another camp: Hammerstein.
- 11:00:39 On the way, American planes bombed the train and many inmates were killed.
- 5:15 The work at Hammerstein was tough. They had to bury corpses that arrived from Buchenwald.
- 6:30 After a month, the death march began. Many fled, and began asking for food in regular homes.
- 14:17 Fishel and his friend fled.
- 26:00 Fishel describes a chance encounter with a couple of old German SS.
- 26:39 Talks about the end of April.
- 29:27 May 9, 1945 was Liberation day.

- 12:05:28 Fishel got ready to go back home to look for surviving relatives.
- 10:11 Their house was destroyed and no one was there. Despair set in.
- 15:00 Through an uncle in England, Fishel finds out that two of his sisters had survived.
- 20:00 Describes meeting his wife-to-be, and getting married in Bergen-Belsen.
- 22:00 Fishel went to live with his wife in England. He describes his decision to go to Israel.
- 26:51 More about the Hammerstein camp where the work was in a quarry. In the midst of the rock, the Germans were building an ammunition factory. Many Jews died there as they were already malnourished and the work was very hard.