

Bergman, Kaziemira
RG-50.120*0325
10 Videotapes
In Hebrew
Recorded December 8, 1997

Abstract

Kaziemira Bergman, known as Kazia by her friends and family, was born in Lodz, Poland in 1918 to a Jewish family. Early on in her life she became aware of the social tensions and the anti-Semitism surrounding her and joined the Communist party as an active member. Her family decided to move to Warsaw after Hitler annexed the Sudetenland, but they would not remain there for long and fled towards Russia. Kazia, however, had returned to Warsaw by the time of the 1941 ghetto round-up. In these tapes, Kazia recounts the memories of her life, work, and political struggles in the ghetto and her deportations to the Majdanek, Ravensbrück, and Sachsenhausen camps. She also shares memories of her eventual liberation by Russian soldiers and of her finding her family after the war. Finally, Kazia discusses how her experiences during the Holocaust affected her life—from anxieties she still has to her move to Israel in 1960.

Tape 1

- 1:01:33** Kazia, as her friends call her, was born in Lodz on October 16, 1918 and taught students Polish in Yiddish. She was the only daughter of secular parents who were teachers, named Abram and Regina Kagan. Abram was the principal of a secular Jewish school, Borochoy, and knew Hebrew very well, but Kazia did not know it. Her grandparents also lived in Lodz.
- 1:09:23** Kazia joined the Communist movement rather than the more socialist-minded left-wing Po'alei Zion.
- 1:10:00** Kazia speaks about her maternal grandparents.
- 1:10:58** Kazia describes her extended family.
- 1:15:00** Kazia tells about how anti-Semitism existed among the lower classes in Lodz.
- 1:27:00** Kazia was expelled from school because she propagandized the Communist party.
- 1:32:40** Kazia talks about the Jewish holidays she and her family would spend at her grandparents' house.
- 1:34:27** Kazia talks about her cousins.

- 2:00:47** Kazia shares that she and her parents only celebrated her birthday and May 1st at home. She especially remembers her seventh birthday, which was during the first year she went to school, when her parents organized a “masquerade ball” for her.
- 2:24:57** Kazia talks about the Polish culture in her home.
- 2:27:43** Kazia speaks of her time spent in jail for a few weeks in 1936 because of her political activism.
- 3:05:34** Kazia talks about the black days of her family, which included Hitler coming to power and the civil war in Spain (1933).
- 3:12:02** Kazia talks of Ringleblum, who was a family friend.
- 3:29:00** She talks about her time in jail.
- 4:02:20** Kazia’s parents wanted to send her to Paris. However, her visa was denied for bad behavior.
- 4:08:24** She went to the University of Warsaw to study Educational Psychology in 1937.
- 4:14:25** Anti-Semitism raised its head, and the Jewish students tried to fight it.
- 5:00:00** In 1938, during Kazia’s second year at the University, Hitler annexed the Sudetenland, and Kristallnacht occurred.
- 5:20:26** Kazia recollects her memories of Kristallnacht.
- 5:24:00** Kazia talks about the summer of 1939 spent with her mother.
- 5:28:00** Kazia describes September 1st.
- 5:30:00** Her family was warned about their Communist affiliation and that the Germans intended them harm because of it. Her family took a few of their possessions and left in the direction of Warsaw.

Tape 2

- 6:01:27** Kazia’s family did not think that Warsaw, as the capital, would be taken over.
- 6:15:59** The family arrived in Warsaw as refugees. They lived in different houses, and many of the houses were destroyed in the bombings.
- 7:02:31** Warsaw surrendered, and rumors of a ghetto began to fly. Her parents decided to return to Lodz from Warsaw, on their own, in order to collect some of their belongings. While there, they tried to convince the rest of their family to also

leave Lodz, and Kazia recounts their reasons. No one in her family was convinced.

- 7:10:00** Her family found a smuggler to take them over the Bug to the Russian side, and they crossed over on November 7, 1939. Her parents went to Bialystok, where there were schools for them to teach. Kazia went to Lvov, where there was a university.
- 7:34:18** Kazia was to start her third year of studies in psychology, but the Russians were only accepting those students who were just shy of attaining their bachelor's degree. However, she and some of the other students were accepted to a Teacher's Institute in their last year to learn to teach Ukrainian.
- 8:04:00** Kazia reflects on the past and her disappointment with Communism.
- 8:24:46** Kazia's father arrived in Lvov. She tried to convince him to go back to Bialystok, but it was to no avail.
- 9:06:00** Kazia's Russian passport had several restrictions on it.
- 9:15:06** Kazia says that she and her group of friends from the Teacher's Institute were about to finish their studies in July 1941.
- 9:20:13** Kazia describes a "round-up."
- 10:09:12** Kazia talks about war breaking out with Russia.
- 10:14:57** Kazia's first job as a teacher was in a place far from Lvov. She should have taught Russian, but she did not know the language so she went back to an employment agency and moved on to her next job.
- 10:28:54** Kazia's boyfriend was mobilized to the Red Army. He witnessed the shooting deaths of a mobilized killing unit at the hands of the local Ukrainians, who shot from balconies and other locations.

Tape 3

- 11:05:13** Kazia and a group of friends fled eastward.
- 11:25:00** After some adventures with her friends, they finally arrived in her parents' town. However, her parents had already left, so they decided to return to Lvov. They barely made it there. Her friend worked for the German soldiers and helped her.
- 12:01:38** Kazia talks about her decision to return to Warsaw. She wrote to her family friend, Ringleblum to ask for his help in returning around September 1941.

- 12:10:06** Rumors reached her about the unbearable hunger in Lodz and they kept her from returning.
- 12:11:00** Ringleblum sent smugglers to escort her to Warsaw.
- 12:15:24** Kazia recollects that in July, Ukrainians were given freedom “to settle accounts” before the Germans took over. To her, these were days of terror and murders.
- 12:21:45** Kazia entered the ghetto on December 24, 1941.
- 12:25:00** Kazia talks about the stores in the ghetto and the feeling of claustrophobia there because of the surrounding walls.
- 12:30:00** Kazia contracted typhoid fever, which was brought on by lice.
- 13:04:00** Kazia talks about her illness and how she had to stay in her room and be taken care of by her roommates.
- 13:20:00** Kazia discusses the organization of the Polish Worker’s Party (PPR).
- 13:24:35** Kazia speaks of going to work in the children’s house, a job arranged by Berman, another of her parents’ friends. Children there were collected from the streets, and they lived better lives in the house than did children living at home with their parents.
- 13:28:10** Kazia reminisces about her work as a teacher at the children’s house.
- 14:02:00** Kazia describes her daily schedule in the children’s house.
- 14:28:27** Kazia says that she began to train with weapons.
- 15:01:00** The admiration for Korczak was tempered by the fact that he did not want anything to do with politics, which disappointed Kazia and her peers.
- 15:03:27** Kazia talks about a report that came to her and her friends about the deportation of the people from Lodz. Some people did not believe the report.
- 15:05:00** Kazia discusses her everyday moods and feelings and those of her fellow teachers.

Tape 4

- 16:0:00** Kazia had heard about Majdanek while still in Warsaw and proceeded to discuss the organization for the deportations from the ghetto. The Jewish police and other people, like fellow teachers, had to convince poor Jews to volunteer for the

deportations in exchange for food. Kazia went to Jewish homes, but she refused to go in to convince people to volunteer.

- 16:22:00** The deportation of the children in her orphanage occurred two days after that of the deportation of the children in Korczak's orphanage.
- 16:25:00** Kazia states that because of a relative, who was a Jewish policeman, she stayed behind and was not deported with the children. Later, it turned out that the entire staff was saved thanks to bribes and other means. Immediately after the children's deportation, however, another round-up began. Kazia went into hiding, but they were found.
- 17:04:00** Kazia talks about the suicide of Cherniakov.
- 17:21:04** Kazia received orders to exit the ghetto.
- 17:22:39** On August 21, the Allies bombed the Warsaw ghetto, which was welcomed by its inhabitants.
- 17:26:17** Kazia and a friend exited the ghetto with a group from the Hashomer Hatzair.
- 18:11:27** Kazia and her friend Lenka went to join the Partisans in Lowicz. However, the Partisans did not want women to join them, so she and her friends returned to Warsaw, where they attained new ID cards.
- 18:17:46** Kazia talks about the atmosphere in the Warsaw streets outside of the ghetto.
- 18:30:00** Kazia discusses how her party activities and her attitude helped her to survive through dangerous situations.
- 19:00:00** Kazia says that she was sent to agitate in a village. She stayed there for a few days until rumors began to spread about her activities.
- 19:04:18** Kazia returned to Warsaw to a safe house.
- 19:19:00** Kazia was forced to leave the safe house when she received new orders to go help someone else.
- 19:35:00** Kazia was detained by the Police and taken to the Gendarmerie. Here, she was accused of being Jewish and a Communist because she always carried a book with her, and this time the book was written by Gorki. She was then taken to the Polish police.
- 20:01:49** Kazia says she was questioned by the Polish police and told them she was Catholic.

- 20:06:07** Kazia states was sent to a prison for prostitutes, where she stayed for a week. She describes in detail her life there.
- 20:18:38** Kazia and another Jewish prisoner were moved to a jail in Paviak, where she stayed for two weeks. She discusses her time there.
- 20:27:14** Kazia was transferred to a different cell, where political prisoners were held.
- 20:30:00** Kazia was taken for questioning by the Gestapo. She was beaten and tried to run away, but they caught and beat her again.

Tape 5

- 21:00:00** The guards' treatment of her was exemplary and tender after her punishment.
- 21:08:45** Kazia talks about November 1942.
- 21:21:56** On January 17, 1943 many people were rounded up in the streets of Warsaw and taken to Paviak. The next day, there was a convoy leaving the place.
- 21:25:06** Kazia and her friend Eva, at whose house she had stayed in Warsaw, were rounded up and sent with their Polish counterparts on a cargo train.
- 21:27:43** They were taken to the Majdanek.
- 22:02:09** Most of the Polish women were political prisoners and took charge of the group at Majdanek by assigning people to different areas, like the barracks. Kazia was in Camp VI.
- 22:11:16** Kazia remembers visitors from the outside, who were allowed to visit their relatives in Majdanek in exchange for bribes for the German guards.
- 22:13:38** Kazia discusses her daily schedule in Majdanek.
- 22:18:48** Kazia states that a hospital was started in the camp.
- 22:28:00** Kazia describes the hierarchy of the camp and the Jews in the camp.
- 22:32:33** Kazia talks about her friend Anya.
- 23:00:00** Kazia tells more about Anya.
- 23:10:31** Kazia discusses the different jobs she had.
- 23:23:00** Kazia shares about the menstrual cycles of the women at the camp.

- 23:23:20** Kazia talks about April 1943.
- 23:23:22** Kazia talks about how she got extra food and received parcels, through the help of Polish inmates.
- 23:29:00** Kazia describes the crematoria at Majdanek.
- 23:32:05** Kazia talks about the “echoes” of Stalingrad.
- 23:33:00** Kazia recounts the hangings she and the others were forced to watch and the reactions.
- 24:00:59** Kazia talks about the cultural life in Majdanek. There were live radio broadcasts in the block before roll call, and Kazia joined in prayer with everyone even though she presented herself as a Polish woman.
- 24:28:26** Kazia talks about a convoy from Warsaw that arrived at Majdanek at the end of April 1943 after the uprising there. They had only heard rumors about the uprising but nothing concrete.
- 24:30:00** Kazia discusses the preparations for the arrival of the convoy.
- 24:32:00** Kazia states that she was recognized by her original name (Kazia Kagan) by a newcomer from Warsaw.
- 25:05:52** On May 1, Kazia and the others wore some kind of red ribbon and went to see the newcomers. They sang revolutionary songs.
- 25:06:50** There was a special block of the camp where children of the new inmates were kept.
- 25:08:10** Kazia says that she had heard about the uprising from the newcomers. The majority of them had reservations and criticism about the uprising.
- 25:25:00** Kazia speaks of when she witnessed the blocks of Jews from Warsaw being led to the gas chambers. Among them were two close friends—Male and Manya—who recognized her upon arrival in Majdanek. Kazia sinks into a depression after seeing them.
- 26:00:00** The situation kept getting worse in Majdanek. The rumor began to spread that they would be transferred to Ravensbrück, and Kazia decided that she would go.

Tape 6

- 27:10:11** Kazia talks about her transport to Ravensbrück towards the end of June and the beginning of July. She and the other inmates had heard that the discipline there

was stricter, but she welcomed that. At Majdanek, volunteers were requested to go to Ravensbrück, and Kazia and all of her friends decided to go, while the Polish women were not inclined to go to Germany. Kazia discusses the importance of her few close friends throughout those critical conditions.

- 27:25:18** Kazia states that no lists exist of those evacuated from Majdanek to Ravensbrück.
- 28:00:57** Kazia says that in July, they were put in men's barracks, after being banished from there, and it was believed that they were put to death immediately.
- 28:06:00** Kazia describes her train journey to Ravensbrück.
- 28:10:50** She describes her arrival in Ravensbrück. There was an examination for Aryan racial features, and all of the Jewish women with Kazia declared themselves Aryan. They all passed the exam after careful measurements.
- 28:18:28** After two to three weeks, they were sent to the work camp in Felten, where there was a plant that produced parts for airplanes. It was clear that the workers would commit sabotage.
- 28:25:52** Kazia discusses the living and working conditions in Felten and her new friends there.
- 29:00:00** Kazia talks about the concept of the "camp family."
- 29:03:35** Kazia describes the recapitulation of her friends and the "common table." The inmates received better food than the regular, civilian, German workers, who were also much older.
- 29:07:03** Kazia talks about the food parcels that came from home for the non-Jews of the camp. However, they shared their parcels, of which onions were a staple, with Kazia.
- 29:10:29** Kazia talks about her daily schedule, food rations, and work.
- 29:35:00** Kazia was accused by a worker of sabotage, but she was cleared, and the accuser was punished.
- 30:01:49** Kazia talks of her experiences and the perils of living with a false identity.
- 30:12:34** A chance opened up for her to return to Ravensbrück from Felten, where work was difficult, but working for the German war efforts was still worse. She and her friends volunteered to go back but were refused.
- 30:17:00** Kazia describes the reaction of the inmates to the visit of the commander's eight year-old child, for his visit made them miss their own children. The child

witnessed his father's cruel punishment of an inmate who skipped her turn at the lunch line.

30:26:48 There were awards for good work, but the inmates refused to accept them. Her punishment was to be sent to Ravensbrück immediately, and she was the first to leave.

30:31:17 Kazia talks about her return to Ravensbrück to the same barracks she had been in originally. All the returnees were later sent to the same barracks in which they had been. There was no forced labor there.

30:34:05 Kazia says that she worked in the vegetable garden, which was difficult but also sporadic.

30:35:10 Kazia says that hunger and cold were the worst for her.

Tape 7

31:00:00 Kazia describes Ravensbrück, which was already established but in advanced disrepair at the beginning of 1944.

31:11:00 Kazia talks about the camp's food.

31:12:54 Kazia discusses the medical exams at the camp.

31:13:29 Ravensbrück was an international camp that contained Russians, Poles, and French.

31:14:42 Kazia discusses the Russian barracks, which were shared partially with the Polish women in Block Number 31, which was the block of the experiments.

31:16:23 Kazia says that the women refused to tell the details of the experiments. However, she knew that they were connected with big bones and possibly transplants.

31:22:07 Kazia mentions her schedule after-work.

32:00:00 Kazia talks about her friends in the group.

32:04:00 Kazia says that the attitude of the Polish women towards the communist girls in the camp was positive, and they hoped they would be saved by the Russians.

32:25:00 Kazia talks about lectures organized by the prisoners and the ways they had to obtain books.

32:30:00 Kazia talks about the services for buying and selling food.

- 33:00:42** Kazia's close friend Eva left Ravensbrück.
- 33:08:59** Kazia speaks of making contacts with the Russian prisoners.
- 33:13:00** Kazia talks about the fate of the Russian prisoners in the German camps who were sent to camps in Russia at the end of the war.
- 33:16:35** Kazia talks more about the cultural activities in Ravensbrück.
- 33:18:00** Kazia says that older women worked in the barracks knitting socks while someone told stories, like *Gone With the Wind*, in installments. Kazia told other stories she had read, like those by Romain Rolland.
- 34:00:00** Kazia talks about the kinds of punishment in her barracks.
- 34:24:19** Kazia says she was transferred to a new work camp, Sachsenhausen, in the summer of 1944. As a political prisoner, she decided that she did not have to work. Consequently, she was beaten and further punished by not getting dinner for the rest of the week. However, she was able to get dinner from her friends in the kitchen and suddenly received a food parcel.
- 35:01:29** In the camp, she had heard about the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. She states that her refusal to work in Sachsenhausen was sent to Ravensbrück. While she waited for disposition of her case, she agreed to help paint items in the camp in a camouflage color which would help during bombings.
- 35:06:35** In August she was ordered to return to Ravensbrück. She traveled there with an escort in a passenger train.
- 35:15:34** Kazia discusses the arrival of the survivors from the Warsaw ghetto rebellion at the camp. They asked themselves "why they did it." She shares stories about the rebellion.
- 35:18:14** Kazia says that her punishment for refusing to work in the factory and propagandizing was twenty five beatings and work.
- 35:25:45** Kazia remembers that it was around October or November when she was returned to Ravensbrück.
- 35:26:27** She worked outdoors, where the work was difficult.
- 35:30:00** Kazia talks about the relationship between the Russian and the Polish prisoners.

Tape 8

- 36:04:26** Kazia describes the administration of physical punishment at the camp.
- 36:19:52** Kazia talks about going to the dentist.
- 36:25:47** Kazia says that in December 1944, the German prisoners began to be sent home, but they did not want to go back.
- 36:27:12** At the same time, her friends decided to get her some time off by sending her to the sick block.
- 36:27:00** Kazia discusses her experiences in the sick block.
- 37:04:43** Kazia talks about the arrival of inmates from Majdanek, including her Jewish friend Anya (Shoshana). She updated Kazia on the happenings of November 1943, when all the Jewish women were taken out and killed by being shot into mass graves they had dug. The group that had arrived from Majdanek was sent shortly afterwards to work at a factory in Leipzig. She heard from them about the uprising in Bialystok.
- 37:14:00** Kazia speaks of her regret about being in a concentration camp doing nothing while her friends and acquaintances behaved with heroism saving others.
- 37:19:24** Kazia was also bothered by the fact that she denied her Judaism by living with a false identity.
- 37:21:55** In January or February, more people arrived in Ravensbrück in bad condition.
- 38:00:36** Kazia says that hunger was prevalent with many people.
- 38:26:44** Punishment for an attempt to flee was to shave everyone's hair.
- 38:15:28** Kazia talks about the arrival of Rosa Telman, the widow of Ernest Telman, who was killed in Dachau either towards the end of 1944 or beginning of 1945. Kazia had been under house arrest with them.
- 38:31:00** Kazia talks about the arrival of female prisoners of war who came with the news that the anthem of Russia was no longer the International, and a new Polish government was in place in Lublin. Also, she shared the news about the liberation of Warsaw and Lodz on January 17, 1945 and her reaction to this news.
- 39:03:08** Kazia talks about the lesbians in the camps at Ravensbrück and Majdanek.
- 39:08:00** Kazia discusses sexual liaisons in Majdanek.
- 39:25:01** Kazia shares more about lesbianism in Ravensbrück and the open expression of it.

- 40:04:21** Kazia talks about the deaths by lethal injection and shooting in Ravensbrück.
- 40:06:00** Kazia remembers that the youth barrack was evacuated and converted into an extermination block, where people were killed either by lethal injection or by hunger.
- 40:10:26** Kazia was in the punishment block for four to six months.
- 40:11:42** Kazia says that on March 3 or 4, 1945, the Red Cross brought food parcels to everyone—not to those in the punishment block.
- 40:17:09** Kazia says that there were no “selections” in Ravensbrück. Instead, entire blocks were evacuated and sent to the extermination block.
- 40:18:21** Eventually the matter of gas chambers was discussed.
- 40:21:00** Kazia talks about the Red Cross visit, where rumors circulated that they were taking the Jewish, then the Polish and the French, but not the German, prisoners to Sweden.
- 40:35:00** Kazia describes guarding her few personal belongings.

Tape 9

- 41:08:00** Kazia speaks of her work while in the punishment block.
- 41:17:15** Kazia shares her dreams for after her liberation.
- 42:00:00** Kazia reflects about what kind of a Jew it took to survive the war.
- 42:22:14** Kazia says that news came that the SS had fled. The inmates took over the kitchen and had their fill of potatoes on April 28, 1945. They started walking from Ravensbrück. A few of the SS escorted them westward towards the Americans and British, but not the entire camp left.
- 43:00:00** Kazia says that the Germans, as well as all kinds of other inmates from work camps, fled.
- 43:15:37** While they expected Russian soldiers, the Germans showed up to find out why they had not fled. They continued walking for a while, and they finally fled when they had an opportunity.
- 43:18:05** Kazia recalls that other people from forced labor camps joined them in their journey.

- 43:19:58** On May 1, they met up with Russian soldiers. They arrived back in Ravensbrück while moving eastward.
- 43:23:07** Kazia describes life with the Russians as very traumatic, so Kazia and her friend fled from them. They returned to a Poland in ruins.
- 43:34:23** Kazia discusses her arrival in Lodz, which had not been destroyed. Kazia was afraid she would not find anyone she knew.
- 44:05:30** Kazia talks about her arrival home. Her concierge, a Jew, offered her his house and a job, as he had decided to leave Poland, but she refused. She asked about the fate of her parents.
- 44:11:30** Kazia found former school mates, who took her to their room and encouraged her to go to the Jewish community in case someone was looking for her, but she hesitated. She found a former student of her father who told her that there was a letter from him looking for her. She was happy to see in the letter that both of her parents survived.
- 44:18:55** Kazia says that in Tashkent, her father ran into her boyfriend, Dalek, on the bus.
- 44:24:07** Kazia discusses an encounter with old friends and the realizations of the dreams she had back in the camp.
- 45:00:00** Kazia says that friends arranged for her to fly to Moscow to meet her parents in Tashkent.
- 45:01:19** She panicked that she would not be able to see her parents because of fear of illness. The panic attack lasted until her trip.
- 45:08:42** Many people went to the destroyed ghetto to look for photos and other memorabilia, but she could not.
- 45:16:00** Kazia says that she went to Moscow in June.
- 45:18:03** Her parents arrived two weeks after, and they all had a great time.
- 45:20:00** She could not bring herself to tell anyone about her war experiences. Her parents did not ask, and she did not tell. Only once she opened up to a couple of friends who listened for an hour and a half to her story. She does not remember what she talked about, or how the topic began. The friends told her parents.
- 45:22:00** Kazia says that fears and anxiety in all kinds of situations came up unexpectedly, as a result of the war years.

Tape 10

- 46:00:00** Kazia discusses her nightmares about the war years later.
- 46:14:59** Kazia says that she spent a good time with her mother in Moscow.
- 46:30:35** She describes leaving Poland and arriving in Israel in 1960. Her parents preceded her by many years, having gone in 1949.
- 47:01:50** Kazia describes keeping in touch with her former friends.
- 47:19:45** Kazia describes her last few years spent in Israel together with her parents.
- 47:22:00** Kazia reflects on her survival, the truth of her testimony, and on the luck that always smiled at her after so many years.
- 48:00:00** Kazia discusses the demise of her friend Niuta.
- 48:08:10** Kazia talks about how her experiences have influenced her motherhood.
- 48:10:00** The name of one of her daughters, Anita (Niuta), was in memory of her friend.
- 48:15:00** Kazia talks about the feeling of mourning that gets stronger as time goes on.
- 48:18:00** Her attitude towards Holocaust memorial institutions is negative because politics is always involved.
- 48:22:38** Kazia says that she has a positive impression of Yad Vashem.