

Berko, Eldar
RG- 50.120.0326
Two Video Cassettes
In Hebrew

Abstracts: Eldar Berko was born in September 1924, in the village of Humenne in eastern Slovakia. Eldar admits that at first he did not know what was going on and how Jews were being treated. In 1942 he was taken by train to what he believed was a work camp, however he was really taken to Auschwitz and then to Birkenau. He describes the population of Auschwitz and his experience as a Sonderkommando. After liberation, in July 1945, he went back to Slovakia and there went to a school for electrical technicians. He met his wife in 1947. He enlisted in the IDF in 1948 in Czechoslovakia and then went to Israel. He served two years in the Israeli army. Later he lived for ten years in Ramat Zvi, where he was an electrician.

- 1:01: Eldar Berko was born in September 1924, in eastern Slovakia in the village of Humenne. He had an older brother and two sisters. His family was not religious. He went to school for nine years. His father had a trucking business. At the age of 17, Eldar also went to work for a truck company.
- 1:12 Eldar talks about his father and mother. At home they spoke both Yiddish and German.
- 1:16 Eldar talks about the youth groups in his village. He joined the Betar group.
- 1:22 In 1940 he heard that Jews were being taken to German work camps. Then Jews were not allowed to go to school so he went to work in a carpentry shop.
- 1:26 Eldar sings songs from Hlinka Gvarda.
- 1:29 Eldar admits that at first he did not know what was going on and how Jews were being affected.
- 1:32 Then in 1942 he was taken by train to what he believed was a work camp.
- 2:00 All the young Jewish men were taken to the police station and then by train to Auschwitz. Some tried to escape to the woods and those that did not try to escape were punished for the actions of the others.
- 2:06 Eldar describes the train ride and arrival in Auschwitz and then in Birkenau. He describes the population of Auschwitz.
- 2:14 He was in Block Seven at Birkenau. He describes the Russian POW's and their suffering. His job was to build roads for the camp. He describes the lack of food and how he and a friend stole food from a kapo and were punished.

- 2:30 Eldar describes the Block Alteste, who was a sadist. At the end of 1942 times were very hard because the Germans were losing in Russia and they took it out on the camp inmates.
- 2:34: He joined the Sonderkommando.
- 3:00 Eldar describes his work as a Sonderkommando and how he dug graves for the dead and threw the corpses in. The German guards were real criminals.
- 3:13 Eldar describes the camp population of French, Dutch and Russian POW's who were all killed. They had to watch people being tortured.
- 3:17 He worked half a year with the Sonderkommando.
- 3:28 He describes an incident when he fell asleep and the whole camp had to stand until he was found.
- 4:00 He was trained to build by Polish builders. He did not know in the beginning that they were building crematoria.
- 4:05 Eldar describes life in camp, food, accommodations and the lice.
- 4:10 He describes how he beat up another prisoner and was punished.
- 4:24 He talks again about food.
- 4:30 Eldar describes Block II which was known as the "Killing Block."
- 4:33 In 1943 he saw gas chambers and was told what happened there.
- 5:00 Every six months the people in the Sonderkommando were killed.
- 5:07 Eldar describes the commando that dealt with the new arrivals from transports and why it was good to work there. One of Eldar friends who worked with him was caught attempting to escape and was hanged.
- 5:14 He built two supply buildings and then worked with horse drawn carriages to bring wood from the forest for building materials. It was a good job and he explains why.
- 5:20 In 1945 he had an affair with a girl in town where he went to get supplies.
- 5:27 In 1944 they heard airplanes and bombings but nothing happened.
- 5:34 Eldar describes the gypsy camp.

Tape Two

- 6:00 Things got better in 1944. They were better organized. Eldar describes bartering for food and things they took from the new camp arrivals.
- 6:06 Eldar describes bombardments near the camp.
- 6:10 In 1942 they were allowed to write home but his letters never arrived.
- 6:18 Eldar explains the continuing effect of the war trauma on his life.
- 6:32 He remembers that in January 1945, they were marched out of camp and then were taken by train to Gross Rosen.
- 7:00 Eldar describes the long march and train ride to Gross Rosen. After some days they were taken by train to Dachau. He describes the train ride in detail.
- 7:08 Eldar describes arrival in Dachau and life in the camp.
- 7:17 In April 1945 the Jews in camp received packages from the Red Cross.
- 7:19 He remembers that they were taken by train to Schongau, where the Germans left them. Eldar describes going to abandoned villages and taking food.
- 7:24 He describes how he and other prisoners forced open a supply storage filled with food rations. Many died from eating too much. On May 1, the American Army arrived and sent them to a convalescence camp for two months.
- 8:00 He explains that he went home and when did not find any of his family he had thoughts of revenge.
- 8:06 In July 1945 he went back to Slovakia and went to a school for electric technicians. He enlisted in the IDF in 1948 in Czechoslovakia and in later the same year went to Israel. He served two years in the army. He met his wife in 1947.
- 8:12 He lived for ten years in Ramat Zvi, where he was an electrician.
- 8:15 Eldar shares his memories of beatings in camp and his thoughts about his survival.
- 8:20 He describes meeting Magda Hans in camp in 1944. She told him of experiments that were conducted on her.

