

**Hermelin, Chaim**  
**RG-50.120\*0386**  
**Interview November 16, 2000**  
**Two Videocassettes**

### **Abstract**

Chaim Hermelin was born on January 1, 1927 in Radzivilov [Chervonoarmeysk], Volhynia, Ukraine. He lived there until 1939. His father owned a printing press and his mother was a housewife. Chaim had two siblings who were older than he. His sister died, but his brother survived. He had a Tarbut school education. Chaim's family was Zionist and traditional. In 1939, the family moved ten kilometers away to Brody, in the Galicia region. In 1941, the Russians invaded Brody. Chaim witnessed transfers to Siberia. The Germans then took over Brody. Roundups and killings were almost immediate. Chaim's father was among those shot. He talks about the fate of his grandfather, the "Aktions", and witnessing the mass murder of Jews. Chaim was forced to move to a ghetto where he helped organize the underground. He talks about the Judenrat and the Jewish police. Eventually, Chaim ran away to Komarówka and tried to find work on farms. He witnessed deportations to Bergen-Belsen after the ghetto was liquidated. Chaim then talks about his activity with the Partisans and transferring to the Red Army as a trainee. He was an aide to a major. The major sent him to study mechanics. Chaim's job was to maintain the "fleet" of wagons and horses, and later the vehicles of the army. Chaim's brother was taken to the Russian Army and was reunited with Chaim, fourteen and a half years later, in Israel. His parents and sister did not survive. Chaim talks about the efforts to get to Palestine and when they were stopped by the British. He spent time in a DP camp in Cyprus, from which he escaped after a period of three months and ten days. When Chaim returned home, he stopped being observant, but returned to his faith after one of his sons was killed during the Yom Kippur War. He is pessimistic about the future of Israel.

### **Time Coded Notes** **Tape One**

- 1:00:00  
00:00 Chaim Hermelin was born on January 1, 1927 in Radzivilov [Chervonoarmeysk] and lived there until 1939. His father had a printing press. His mother was a housewife. Chaim had one sister, Manya, who was three years older. He also had a brother, Shmuel, who was one year older. Chaim went to the Tarbut Jewish school. At home, the family spoke Yiddish and a little Hebrew. His parents spoke Hebrew. Chaim's father also spoke English, German, Russian, Polish, and Yiddish. Chaim lived in an observant religious home.
- 03:40 Since Chaim was the third child to go to school, his parents did not have enough money to send him to Tarbut, and so they put him in a Polish school. There, they had to pray and cross themselves. Chaim did not like it and refused to go to that school. Somehow, his parents did manage to send him to the Tarbut school.
- 04:50 He talks about holiday celebrations at home, his daily schedule, and how he spent summers at nearby places.

- 07:03 Chaim discusses work at the printing press, preparing wrappings for the market, invitations, and so on.
- 07:57 The city of Radzivilov [Chervonoarmeysk] was at that time considered to be in Volhynia. Brody, where the family moved to in 1939, was in Galitcia even though it was ten kilometers away. The border between the two was in the middle of the town.
- 08:16 Chaim talks about his grandparents. His father had a twin sister who lived in Brody. Chaim knew only one grandfather, Berl Hermelin. He exported feathers.
- 09:44 The Russians invaded Brody in 1941. When they came, Chaim's father was afraid that they would take away his business and send him to Siberia as an "exploiter of the masses."
- 11:21 Until 1941, Chaim did not know much about the war. Then refugees began arriving in Brody. The Russian authorities demanded that the refugees, who were German, apply for Russian passports. The refugees refused. On a Shabbat morning, all of the refugees were put on cattle cars and, under heavy guard, were taken away. Chaim said that they were the lucky ones.
- 14:19 The transfer to Brody, and to a Russian school, was not an easy one for Chaim. He was used to a Zionist education. Immigrating to Palestine was a dream, but getting there had been impossible. In Radzivilov [Chervonoarmeysk], all the youth movements were represented.
- 16:48 Chaim talks about going to hear Jabotinsky talk in another city.
- 17:29 He was forced to join the Komsomol. He was an excellent student. There was no anti-Semitism as it was punished immediately.
- 18:54 During the middle of the night on June 24, 1941 the Germans attacked.
- 20:00 Chaim did not look Jewish, so he was free to go around the city. He witnessed the tragedies unfolding in Brody, including the roundup of the intellectuals (over 500 people) and the shooting of people (among them Chaim's father) in the forest. The Ukrainians helped to roundup the Jewish people in town. Holes for graves were dug by the victims themselves. The next day, the hole was covered and sprayed with plaster.
- 28:25 Chaim talks about the fate of his grandfather at the hands of the SS.
- 29:00 He talks about the different "Aktions."
- 2:00:00 Chaim and his brother Shmuel built a secret hiding place for themselves and other family members. He got work at a hospital for TB patients. Chaim was discovered as a Jew and fired.
- 06:17 He talks about the "Aktion" of the youth who had the red work cards. Chaim was witness to the murder of a total of 3,000 Jews.

- 08:58 He talks about the case of the head of the Judenrat. In a previous "Aktion," he saw the Jews who were supposed to go to work camps in Lutsk coming back on stretchers, ill and emaciated. The second time he was asked to supply workers, he refused. He was shot and killed on the spot.
- 09:23 Chaim talks about the Jewish police. The person in charge was named Rubin. Chaim believed that they were worse than the SS.
- 12:07 Chaim tried to run away and arrived at the village of Bulduri, where the family of a TB hospital patient lived. He was received warmly and given work in the fields. Later on, he was asked to work for the mayor and stayed there until the beginning of winter. No one could support another person during the winter. It was long and there was not enough food.
- 16:51 Chaim was directed to a widow's house in Pisku. Her name was Rivutska. She owned many fields.
- 18:21 The local shepherds identified Chaim as a Jew, surrounded the house, and asked him to come out. Rivutska sent them away. Her son and daughter had returned to the house by then. Chaim was told to go to another village, Komarovka, where Czechs had many fields that needed help.
- 20:12 Chaim managed to get work immediately. He spent the entire winter there, but slept outside because he was afraid he would be undressed and identified as a Jew.
- 21:50 One night, while selling merchandise he had bought from a farmer for three times as much as it was worth, Chaim was caught by Partisans. He joined them and was a reconnaissance person.
- 24:07 Chaim talks about the ghetto and surviving typhoid.
- 31:20 His mother came from a family of eleven children.
- 03:00:00 Chaim talks about the second "Aktion" before the ghetto was established. They were forced to suffocate a baby so that he would not make a sound when the Germans ordered everyone out. They hid there for three days with no food or water.
- 04:38 There were many informers among the Ukrainians. Rubin, the head of the Jewish Police, was a collaborator. He talks about Rubin's actions.
- 07:57 Chaim talks about his job in the ghetto.
- 12:55 His family survived for six months in the ghetto until they were discovered by an informant. They were all killed on the spot.
- 16:09 Chaim talks about escaping the hospital towards Bulduri after he was unmasked as a Jew.

- 17:52 He talks again about witnessing killings during the first "Aktion."
- 18:36 Chaim talks about work camp number twenty-two, the airport nearby, and so on.
- 19:22 He talks about the roll-calls and the killings for no reason at the work camp. There were older, armed escorts.
- 21:42 Chaim talks about the work life in the ghetto. He had to stand in line for bread. He talks about Fogel, the line guard. The living conditions were bad; Chaim lived "by the hour."
- 27:07 He talks about organizing an underground resistance.
- 27:27 Chaim talks about the underground boycotting the Nazis.
- 33:21 There were forced "contributions" for the Nazi coffers, mainly gold.
- 34:11 The Judenrat did not engage in social aid.
- 04:00:00 Chaim again talks about the first and second "Aktions." He talks about shooting babies that were thrown into the air from their strollers, like skeet shooting. Chaim was the only one of ten survivors from Brody who could walk around freely.
- 05:39 He talks about images of the war.
- 06:37 There was a lot of despair.
- 07:38 After the ghetto was liquidated, any Jew who was found hiding or loitering was brought to one of the empty houses of the Jews. Once inside, they and the house were set on fire.
- 10:00 Chaim talks about stealing food from the PX.
- 13:06 His chores in the hospital were cleaning and milking the hospital's cows.
- 17:39 Chaim's mother did not work in the ghetto and neither did his sister. She was already eighteen.
- 19:57 He talks about the frequency of incidents like a Jewish policeman who was ready to denounce his family in order to survive.
- 21:00 Chaim's sister also contracted typhus.
- 21:42 He was sure he would not survive the war, but his deepest desire was to kill at least two Germans. Chaim thought about this when the ghetto was being evacuated.
- 23:07 At first, he was taken to the Płaszów camp, then to Bergen-Belsen. He talks about the cattle cars.

- 24:32 Chaim talks about the rabbi's attitude. It was that the Jews were dying for the sanctification of God.
- 27:27 Chaim stopped keeping commandments during the war once he had left his house. His only regret was that he had been circumcised since he looked Aryan otherwise. Because of this, there was danger in being discovered as a Jew.
- 31:52 Chaim prayed only on horseback while leading the sheep to take them to the pasture. After his entire family was killed, he prayed to be spared.

### **Tape Two**

- 05:01:30 By mistake, Chaim found himself in Komarówka. He describes the work he found at a Czech's farm. He talks about activity with the Partisans.
- 06:47 He talks about his transfer to the Red Army as a trainee. He became the adjutant of a major, who was supposed to become Brody's mayor. Chaim talks about his job there.
- 08:47 The Red Army took over Brody and it became an independent entity. The major became the mayor and Chaim stayed with him. His job changed from caring for the horses to being in charge of guarding the grain storage silos. Then he was sent to study mechanics.
- 10:00 Chaim talks about meeting his brother, Shmuel, and getting papers to go to Poland. Shmuel was taken by the Red Army, enrolled there, and then was sent to Manchuria. For fourteen and a half years, Chaim did not know anything about him! Between 1956 and 1957, Shmuel managed to go to Israel.
- 16:05 From Brody, Chaim got papers to go to Poland. His goal was to go to Israel. He had a lot of money.
- 17:02 He talks about meeting the mayor after the end of the war. He worked for the mayor again as a manager of a fleet of hundreds of vehicles. There were great benefits and a good salary. Chaim put a lot of money "on the side." He talks about Poland, and arriving at a Hachsharah to a training farm, or "kibbutz," which Chaim supported financially on his own for six months. He talks about the Gordonia kibbutz and life there.
- 24:25 Chaim talks about the trip to Palestine. He travelled through Czechoslovakia, Vienna, Bari, and Barletta. He worked in the organization of illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine.
- 26:00 He became the appointed leader of a group of over sixty Jews from Romania. From Castle Gandolfo they went on boats to a ship waiting for them. The ship was named Yehiam and it took 860 refugees.
- 28:49 Chaim talks about a storm while at sea.

- 30:06 The ship stopped in Crete where they were shot at by a Greek vessel. Chaim was captain of the ship. They continued to Palestine, but were intercepted by the British and taken aboard as prisoners to Cyprus.
- 06:00:00 Chaim talks about processing inside the DP camp. He and five other friends decided they did not want to stay in the DP camp and escaped after three months and ten days. Chaim talks about the arrival in Haifa and the aftermath. He met his wife in Tsefat, where they still live today.
- 12:12 Chaim stopped being religious until the Yom Kippur War when his son died. Then he returned to religion.
- 14:23 Since the war, when he closes his eyes at night, Chaim immediately starts to see the "film" of his life during the war.
- 15:00 He talks about going back to the Ukraine long after the war.
- 19:00 Chaim talks about his public offices in Israel. He tells the story of his son David and how he fell in the Yom Kippur War.
- 07:00:00 Chaim talks about the arrival of his brother, Shmuel, to Israel.
- 04:21 Even today, he has not shared his experiences of the Holocaust with his wife.
- 07:00 Chaim reflects on the war and the future of the world.
- 09:11 He believes the duty of the Jews is to study the Holocaust in order to prevent a new one.
- 11:17 He talks about his Arab neighbors. Chaim believes they do not need weapons; they can slaughter all of the Jews with their knives and their hatred.
- 12:39 Chaim talks about the unreasonable hatred of the Germans, etc.
- 14:36 He talks about the importance of Israel to the Jews both there and abroad.
- 16:39 Chaim talks about his feelings of isolation after his arrival in Israel.
- 22:00 He is pessimistic about the future of Israel and about the quality of IDF.