

-TITLE-BERKO KOLODNEV
-I_DATE-4/9/91
-SOURCE-BOSTON - ONE GENERATION AFTER
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

Q: In which city and country were you born?

A: I was born in the village named Krynki In the north of Poland.
On the border between Poland and White Russia.

Q: Who were the people in your family?

A: We were a large family. Five brothers, three sisters. But they
0:1:35 were all killed by Hitler.

Q: What did your family do for a living?

A: My father was a businessman. First in clothing manufacturing.
Later a leather factory. We were comfortable.

Q: What kind of schooling did you have?

A: I had a very orthodox schooling. Learned a lot of Bible. Moved
with father to Gaustock (?) and accepted to high school. Learn
Talmud with rabbi because father was very orthodox. I graduated
with golden medal. Served one year as volunteer in Russian army in
1912-3. I wanted to be accepted to the university but as a Jew they
didn't accept me. So I wanted to leave but world war erupted. I was
taken as soldier in Russian army. I had luck. I was not sent to the
front. This way I stayed alive.

After war I return to my parents in Klinki(?). We become very poor
people. It was a bad time. I gave lessons to high school. One year.
With great difficulty I came to Switzerland. I was accepted to
University of Bern in 1919. Graduated as doctor of medicine from
faculty of Bern in 1925. Served as volunteer assistant of
university hospitals. Beginning in neurology then dermatology.

Q: When did you return to Poland?

0:59:7

A: 1926.

Q: At that time did you have any contacts with non-Jews?

0:6:20

A: I prepared to pass Polish state board called Nostrafricaska(?). I had some contact: intelligence, students. I helped Polish students to pass examination. I passed the Nostrafrienacha.

Q: Did you have any non-Jewish friends?

0:6:75

A: Mostly my patients.

Q: Did you have any anti-Semitic experiences before war?

A: The first anti-Semitic experience, they didn't accept me in Russian University because I am a Jew. It was a present no.

Q: Any physical violence because you were a Jew?

0:7:11

A: No. I personally didn't experience any special violence.

Q: What option did family have when it became clear war would break out?

0:7:60

A: Everybody tried to get out. To run away from Hitler. But were unsuccessful and stayed.

Q: How did you find out war started?

0:8:05

A: I was a physician in Vilna. First 3 days German Flyers came. Then German army. The Jews were confused whether to run away or not. Some started and German soldiers told us: Why were you running away, we weren't coming after you anyway. We will do to you nothing.

Later will come the SS. Then you will experience what it means to be a Jew.

Q: How did your life change because of the war?

0:8:75

A: I was in Ghetto Vilna. I functioned as physician. There I have different experiences. I can only tell the most shocking. When they brought us to the Ghetto, first day in the middle of the night they took us to Lukishki(?). It was incarceration. They put men separate

from women. They give us room without furniture. Only walls. Put 300 men or more in room. Maximum could be 50. There was no place to lay or sleep. In 3 days they did not give us nothing to eat, nothing to drink. At same time nature to urinate and have bowel movements. We separate room for bowel movements and

10:10 urination. That what people ate and drank. I cannot forget picture of one rabbi. He was lying so pale. After 3 days they gave a little water. They came in and said: Where's professional men. You will go back to Ghetto. And the others they did not say. But we knew. They took them to Banali. And there they shoot them. I grant myself physician. They let me out. I came back to Ghetto.

10:95 There came one young boy who was suppose to shoot but he was wounded. He told the Germans were shooting. We did not believe him. A very bitter experience. In Ghetto Vilna the lead commander shoot the barrack. Gave out billets. White billets and white with red stem. Those with these billets is saved. Who does not, is not. But they cheated. They said those with billets should come to he of Judenrat. They shot them. Later they issued yellow billets. Who had yellow billet

11:80 could stay alive. All others couldn't stay alive.

Q: How did you get a yellow billet?

A: The Judenrat distributed the yellow billets. They got approximately 700. I was unlucky. I did not get. The Judenrat put 2 or 3 for the physicians. One yellow billet was for me and a colleague of mine. Who should get this billet? There was a race and he won. So I had to hide myself. I and many rabbis lived in a synagogue. In a roof. It is very small. They put a ladder to roof. Then we pulled ladder up to roof. Thought we were safe. But the Germans went from

13:02 roof to roof. We had to step down from ladder. I stepped down quickly. One Jewish girl, 18, was dressed for winter and could not step down quickly. They hurt her. Commandant pulled out pistol and shot her. Of course she fell to the floor. I got confused and didn't know what to do. At this time I got beat on my head and pushed to the floor. There was yelling and crying. They gave me yellow star that "I should wear as a red flag because all Jews are communists."

14:09 German trucks were ready to take us to Lukishki for incarceration. I was passing a member of the Judenrat. He offered a collaborator of the german, 1000 nitzer. This person took me and my wife and child and pushed us into cot. He stood by cot until nobody was left. One women tried to get into cot but this same soldier shot her. She fell to floor.

Q: How was the Ghetto formed?

1:50:0

A: The usual closing. They took us from Vilna to Banali. There we got special forms. White and blue stripes. I came to concentration camp in Voyvari. There I worked as a physician.

Q: Where was the rest of your family?

A: In Vilna I was only with my wife. The rest was in Krynki. It was impossible to get any contact.

Q: Was there any resistance in Ghetto?

1570

A: Yes there was a resistance. I don't know the details. Part of resistance in one house detonated one German house. The resistance collapsed.

Q: What did the resistance consist of?

A: Young people. Partly Zionists. One young girl walked with a gun. She said I will not give away my life.

Q: What was a normal day in the Ghetto like?

1635

A: We lived in one room. Three families. With children. We were all hungry. The Judenrat gave us piyoke(?) - a pot of food. As a physician got first a third of piyoke then a half. The other people got only a third. They were starving. As a physician I had to visit some people. Terrible was the fate of the elderly people. I remember elderly Jewish women. Cold, winter frost. Ropes were covered with ice. The women were lying in bed shivering.

Q: What other kind of work did people do in the Ghetto?

1740

A: The work was different. Some for the Germans. The most important were those who worked for Germans. Perform axias(?) They take 2,000 people to Lukishki then Banali. Then a couple of months later they took 5,000 people. They liquidated Vilna.

Q: Which were people to go?

A: People were found hiding. They took away.

Q: Who was they?

1810

A: The Germans. With the help of Lithuanian collaborators.

Q: Was there any cultural life?

A: Yes. There was a man named Gentz. He tried to help saved the intelligence. With his help the Vilna had referent. One read about Mendelson. Gentz tried the best to keep the humor of the people. But finally they shoot him too. They tell him you know too much. They wanted to put a mask on his face to shoot him. He tore it off and said if you want to shoot me, shoot me.

Q: Were there schools for the children?

1905

A: You can not call them schools. There was partly one for children. But they liquidated them too.

Q: How did you arrive in a concentration camp?

A: We were separated. My wife was transported to Auschwitz. She was liquidated in Auschwitz. I was transported to Vivari. To Estonia.

Q: How were transported?

A: by train. All the residents of Vilna were exported to Estonia.

Q: Was it an open train?

A: No. It was not a train for people. Cattle train. The small windows they put wire. I am confused; excited that I cannot find the phrase. We left for-Vilna to Vivari. It took us 7 days. They didn't give us any to eat. From time to time a little to drink. Many people died. Then we came to Vivari. We stopped. As a train worker my errand was to clean the rooms and help disinfection.

Q: What were the conditions like there?

2:04:8

A: People lived in barracks. For two days they got a loaf of bread. Sometimes we got soup. But most of the times it was bread.

Q: When you arrived at the camp was there a selection?

A: Oh yes. From time to time they use to put people in columns. They came and use to lift finger and you had to go out and wait. I was lucky they never pointed to me. that is why I say that it is a miracle that I stayed alive. To this day I do not know how I stayed alive.

2:14:0 From Vivari they took me Chlomea. They need a physician. Terrible conditions. Cold. There was no food. Seven people got a part of one loaf of bread each day. They prepared a large kettle of farina(?). There was many older people. There fate was terrible. They did not have the strength.

If you stay in the barracks the Germans will shoot you. Many preferred to stay in the barracks.

2:20:0 From Chlomea they took us to Golfields(?). there was a big snowstorm. You could not see in front of you. It was a hunger march. In Goldfelds I remember I use to beat stones on the Shosche(?).

Q: Where did you go after that?

A: From Goldfelds they took us to Ladigo(?) then they took us to Redl. A port city. Now the capital of Estonia. There they put us in ships. We came to Lansing. From Langsing they took us to Stuthoff. A big concentration camp.

Q: Before you got to Stuthoff you were on a ship with a lot of people?

2:31:7

A: Then they put us on small boats, sloyzen(?) as they call this in Germany. Finally we came to Stuthoff. It was so bright, but we knew what was expected there.

Q: How did you know?

A: Because people were communicating with each other. They appointed me to work on roofs. To put cover on roofs. I remember a joke. I had an elderly over me. A Polish man, who speaks Polish. He asked me what is my profession. I told him in Polish lachesh(?). Lachesh means a man who is preparing roof.

He came to me and said to me: look I don't know if you are good Dechish(?) I told him I am a lechish not a dechish. So he started to help me. When had to prepare material. I was too weak to do this so he helped me.

Q: What kind of thoughts did you have while in the camps?

2:41:0

A: Mostly how to get a little food. And whether we would stay alive or not. But we did not care about our life. We were so hungry and did not care about life. We were indifferent to it.

Q: When did you get to Stuthoff?

A: I don't remember exactly. Let's say '44. We stayed only one month. Then from Stuthoff we were transferred by train to almost all Germany. I remember the cities: Yenna, Elfor, Leipzig(?). Why they dragged us all over I don't know. Finally they placed us in Goldwitz, in Saxonia. In Goldwitz we worked al the time. But the Russians came closer and closer. In Goldwitz there were many big supplies of statwitz. We had to transfer the statwitz from one

2:51:0 place to another. There were thousands. I was not a physician in Goldwitz.

Q: Back in Stuthoff can you describe the daily routine?

A: We used to go to work. It was easy to go. At noon time they gave us to eat.

Q: How were you woken up in the morning?

A: Very early in the morning. They gave us at noon time a little cabbage in water. At night they gave us bread and a piece of salami.

Q: So you were working the whole day?

A: The whole day.

Q: What did you do in the evening?

2:6:00

A: It was interesting. Trying not to let other people steal our shoes.

Q: Did you think you would survive the war?

A: I was not sure. Under no circumstances. I was waiting every day to share the same fate as the others. As before it was a miracle that I stayed alive.

Q: Why do you think you stayed alive?

A: I don't know. All my brothers and sisters were killed. My mother was killed. Many people that were working with me were killed.

Q: Throughout the war was there a friend that survived with you?

A: Dr Brigetski(?). He wrote a book about Vilna. He decided to go to Israel after the war.

Q: How did you manage to stay together with your friend?

A: As I Told you the story of the yellow billet. He survived.

Q: But you were not together during the war?

A: We were together in Vilna and Vivari. In Cholmea. then they separated us. Where and when I don't know. He went to Israel after the liberation.

Q: Any special experiences you would like to tell me about?

2:75:0

A: I told you about the girl. In Cholmea they use to burn the Jewish troops. It was terrible. They use to have this clinic room. there were dead lying for days in this room.

Q: Did you see that?

A: I saw it myself when they burned.

Q: What happened after Goldwitz?

A: They gave us a loaf of bread to go to Theresien Stadt We performed a starvation march. I remember exactly the dates. On April 13, 1945, we left. We came on April 27. In Theresien even the Germans had to admit they were being defeated. Somehow I got a German paper. I told people we should stay and maybe be saved. But there were spies among the people. Then they called me. They told me I was to get shoot. it was my destiny. But you know who saved me. A cook. He prepared good meals. The same cook had the German newspaper. He talked to his superior and saved me. He told me if your suppose to live you live.

1:14:0 I was at Buckeroff for two weeks after Stutthof. I was thinking I was dying at Buckeroff. I was well know in Vilna as a physician. People who knew my try to get me food. They gave me cane from the hills. I could not tolerate this. I was all wet and I washed myself. Around the barrack there were walls with water pipes. it was the middle of winter but I undressed and gave myself a douche. I went to barrack with wet clothes but many times that night I had to wash again. I was sure I was going to die. Then I was taken to Goldwitz.

Q: How did you find out war was going to end?

A: In Theresien. A general of Russian army came into Theresien April 27. They were coming closer and closer with bombs. We knew they were approaching.

Q: How did you know they were approaching?

3:13:3

A: We saw it on the faces of the Germans. People knew. I forgot to tell you, during the hunger march from Goldwich, we knew already that Germans were defeated and some people began to run away. One boy of 19 or 20 years. They caught him and put him in front of march, told him to turn around and shot him.

In Theresien Stadt I was a physician. There was no penicillin. I could not help the people.

Q: What was it like as a physician to see people dying?

A: I had no remedies. All I could do was bring a bag with some material if someone wounded himself to stop the bleeding. That's all that I could do. One day Turkish troops, Russian troops came in. But I became very sick. Infection of the hairs. My face was swollen and pus was running and freezing like icicles to my face. I went to Prague. The hospital was nothing. They had no penicillin. I was there 3 or 4 months. there was a sympathetic physician who said the only way cure me was to use x-rays to lose hair. All my hair fell out along with the pus.

Q: How did you leave Theresien Stadt?

4:30:0

A: I talked to Russian soldiers. I speak Russian very well. They listened and took me to Prague. There was I thing I wanted to remember. When I was in Istonia I had to clean the barracks. Then came the Germans came to look if it was over-clean. They checked under the people laying down and found Jewish religious things. I tried to save these things and the collaborator did not like this and hit me.

There was a Jewish doctor who stopped the bleeding with gauze. And the bleeding stopped. You can see the scar.

Q: What kind of physical condition were you in at the end of the war?

4:43:1

A: They call this in America skin and bones.

Q: What about your emotional state?

A: Of course we were glad that we were safe, but we had a lot of emotional experiences. I wanted to know what happened to my family. I wanted to know what happened to my wife. I tried by all means, by all sources to find out. There was a Judenrat but they didn't know. Later I learned from some people that the last train from Vilna was directed to Auschwitz. This was the most emotional. I was thinking I am getting crazy. Incidentally there was some Germany against Hitler. In Goldwitz there was a man I worked with against Hitler. He would sometimes get me food. I was so preoccupied with finding my family. Is there some alive to find them.

Q: How did you decide where to go after the war?

4:54:1

A: This was a big question. Many decided to go to Israel. Two men were debating. One said the situation in Israel was bad but would improve. The other no don't go. You will starve there. I did not know what to do. I decided to go to America.

Q: Where did you go after Prague?

A: From Prague I went as a physician to Santo Tilian.

Q: what made you decide to go to Santo Tilian?

A: Good food. Big Hospital. So I decided to go. Most of the people there are Lithuanian. Real nice people. April 5th the Russian occupied Prague. In October or November I was accepted to hospital.

Q: How did you find out what happened to brothers and sisters?

4:66:5

A: I learned about this in New York. From a physician who was married to a girl from Krynki. I asked her. All the people were taken to Treblinka and there they were liquidated.

Q: But you did not find out anything immediately after the war?

1:89

A: I went this way, this way but could find nothing until this woman.

Q: Where is Santo Tilian?

A: Forty miles from Munich. A famous monastery mentioned by Thomas Mann. We took part of the monastery as a hospital. It was famous all over Germany at the time.

Q: Where were you living at the time?

3:20

A: First I was in the hospital for an operation. There were nuns in the hospital they were like servants. They use to bring us tea, coffee. I had a room in the monastery.

Q: How long did you live in Germany before you came to America?

A: When I graduated from Switzerland, I practiced in Poland. Then I went to Berlin to specialize in gynecology. At the same time I was visiting all the hospitals in Berlin.

Q: How long did you stay in Santo Tilian before you came to America?

5:20

A: From November '45 until they transferred hospital in spring of '48. So I stayed for three years.

Q: So you met your wife..

A: I met my wife in Santo Tilian.

Q: How did you meet her?

A: I meet many people. For that time she was an extraordinary beauty. And I fell in love with her.

Q: When did you decide to come to America?

A: At that time we went to Augsburg. Finally we took a ship to Holland. We came to Europe on July 15, 1950.

Q: What kind of feelings did you have toward the Germans in Santo Tilian? 732

A: We did not have German feelings, but American feelings. The Americans fed us so. They gave us a quarter pound of butter a day. they really fed us.

Q: There were no Germans there?

A: The Germans were very good to us. But I have no grudge against America. I remember what they did for us in Santo Tilian. I remember what they did for us here. When I came here, I had nothing. They helped us. I had to pass English examination and state board. They helped me.

Q: How has the war affected you?

8:40

A: Its a very difficult question to answer. I cannot say I am satisfied with myself. I will not say that I am completely broken. But I am not as complete as I would like to be. I have many emotional problems. I do not know why I didn't go to Israel. American is best for food but not our emotions.

Q: How did they not help with your emotions.

A: I cannot adjust to American life.

Q: Did you talk about your war experiences when you came here?

A: I am myself a psychiatrist. I discuss this with many psychiatrists many times. There is no answer.

Q: What is like to discus with the psychiatrists?

A: We talk about what happens in camps. But it did not help much.

Q: What was the reaction of the people to whom you talked?

9:80

A: They were not shaken. I am sorry to say this. They would go "oh oh" for awhile then forget about it. Even worse now if I try to discuss this people don't want to listen to me. Would you believe it.

Q: What kind of feeling do you have now about being Jewish?

A: I am proud. No more hurt.

Q: Are you still observant?

1:05:1

A: That's a good question. I am observant partly. Our kitchen is kosher. I am always fighting with my wife: why aren't you introducing a kosher kitchen.

Q: Did you even apply for war reparations?

A: Yes. I applied like everybody else.

Q: Did you get any?

A: Of course I did.

Q: What are your feelings about getting the reparation?

A: That's a good question. There was a debate about whether to accept them from the Germans and see these as redemption. This is wrong. The money they are giving us is not their money but ours. In the mountains of Germany there are lots of Jewish gold. And how can you replace life with money. They are wrong. I hate them.

Q: Did you talk to your children about the Holocaust?

1:17:5

A: I talked to them.

Q: How was that for you?

A: You feel to a certain degree not completely total. I doubt they are really happy about it. Inside I feel a void.

Q: Do you think another Holocaust is possible?

A: Sure another Holocaust is possible. Look what happened. The Turk performed a Holocaust on the Armenians. Hitler brought the example. Only if Israel will be strong will there be no Holocaust.

In Switzerland I was working in dermatology. There were two

assistants. They showed me the blood of the Montania moth. The other physician started to laugh about the Jewish physicians. They only work with mice and rice.

1:4:50 One day this anti-Semitic assistant injected a woman with a dermatological clinical aaronic. She got such an upset and high temperature. She said she came to be cured not killed. She got an abscess. The assistants were cutting and I asked what are you doing.

Why don't you use a syringe to get the pus. So they use the needle and immediately the found the pus. The women was saved.

1:5:34 A few days later the same anti-Semitic, Godima, came to me and said how big is Israel. How big is Palestine. He became a Zionist. Abraham Lincoln once said that the most difficult thing to do is convert an enemy. I had this experience.

Q: In which way does the war still affect you today?

A: Of course. I still think of the past. I worry about my family. There's a lot of worries. I still cannot adjust to American life. About the future.

Q: Do you have any nightmares about your war experiences?

A: Sometimes.

Q: Even now.

1:6:44

A: Sometimes.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

A: What I will say to you I will say in Jewish: (see 1657-1670)

Q: How did you feel about answering these questions today?

A: I think it will help in history. That people should not forget about this. This is the only thing that I am interested in. I don't do this for you. I don't want to upset anybody. I was talking to the people of future generations. They should know because they are already forgetting. And there are now German Neo Nazis, German pacificators of history who said there was no Holocaust, there was nothing, nothing, nothing.

Q: Thank you Dr. Kolodnev.

.END.→