

And Avraham, you can look at me. And in the ghetto you decided to keep evidence. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Well, I thought that they keep us in the ghetto in order that the outer world should not know what transpired inside the ghetto. So I thought it is important for me to write down a diary and mark down what happened in the ghetto day by day.

And what other things did you do to keep a record?

I beg your pardon?

What other things did you do as evidence?

Well, I kept also documents, various documents.

What kind of documents?

Let's say the orders of the Germans, orders and whatever it takes to cultivate to viewpoint for a future generation.

When you kept track of the German orders, how did you do that?

I bet your pardon?

How did you do that? Did you have someone to type the orders?

I did it myself.

Tell me about Gadiel's workshop.

Oh, Gadiel, yes. Gadiel was a very important graphic. He was a master of graphics, and he had a workshop with graphics. And we were in very close contact with him all the time.

You gave him assignments.

I beg your pardon?

Did you give him jobs to do for you?

Yes, of course.

Tell me about it.

Well, I thought that something important should be put also by video. I asked him to prepare in writing a document in writing.

Do you remember this document?

Oh, yes.

Tell me a little. Describe that document to me.

Can you give me-- Well, this is a certain summary of killings in the ghetto for a period of several months. And this is what I get the fire and killing and this was in the ghetto for a period of approximately two months. And I put it in. I

asked Gadiel that he should put it in a visualized form so we can remember it.

Can you tell me this part of it? It's the same thing, the same document but a chart.

Yes. Yes. This is a balance of two months of killings. On the 9th of September and October in 1944 in the ghetto. This is men, women, around the tragedy the 28th of October was a very crucial day in the ghetto where people were killed and that's why I put it especially.

OK, let's cut camera for a minute. Do you remember the start of the war.

I beg your pardon?

Do you remember when the war started?

When the war started?

Yeah, what did you hear? What was it like?

Well, they start shooting and the arresting of Jews in the street and so on.

What kinds of things happened to the Jews in the early days?

In the early days they used to get Jews on the streets and take them into the fort or to the jail.

And when the ghetto was set up, how did everyone move into the ghetto?

There was an order from the 15th of August everyone has to be in the ghetto. It was an order, official order of the government.

How did they move there?

I beg your pardon?

How did everyone move there?

First of all, most of the people lived in the area or the ghetto. And the others had to move. They get a special date. To this date everyone has to move to the ghetto.

Tell me about the aktion, the great action on October 28.

This was a big aktion. 10,000 people were taken away from the-- All the Jews from the ghetto were ordered to appear on the Democrat Square, which was a great square, and there they selected and take 10,000 away and they never came back.

Tell me about raiding the potato fields. Do you remember that?

Yes, of course, because there was starvation and people were hungry. So they started to take out the potatoes from the ground before it was ripe.

Was that dangerous?

I beg your pardon?

Was it dangerous?

It was dangerous because people were hungry and when you are hungry, you don't think about dangerous or not dangerous.

Tell me what you did with the artists. Did you send Esther Lurie and Joseph Lipshitz to make pictures?

I was all the time with Esther Lurie in contact. And also Lipshitz, of course. Yes.

What did you tell them to do?

They recorded what I thought was important to eternalize from the ghetto.

You sent them to do pictures?

Yes. Tell me.

I went with Esther Lurie for the reason that I was a part of the ghetto that were taken out of the framework of the ghetto. So there was a way we could go there. But I went with her, with Esther Lurie, and she painted from a hidden house.

That was a house where there had been--

I beg your pardon?

Was that the dentist's house?

No.

The hospital, where the hospital was burned.

No. This is the area.

The hospital burning. Tell me about that.

The hospital building where the patients and the doctors. They just put it on fire and they didn't let the fire brigade from the ghetto to come close and liquidate the fire

Why did they do that?

The Germans wanted to kill the Jews. It was simple like that.

Did they give an order they were going to set the hospital on fire?

No, they just put the fire and finished without any announcement, without any prior announcement.

Did you see the fire?

Of course.

Tell me about it.

Everybody could see the fire. And the fire brigade that came close they didn't let them deal with the fire.

What time of day was it? Tell me about it.

Daylight, in the morning. In the morning.

Tell me about how people moved to the ghetto. How did they move there? Did they have carts and horses?

Cats and horses. But the Lithuanians were ordered not to serve the Jews. But nevertheless they served and there were rows, long rows through the streets of Kovno on the way to the ghetto. I have some pictures even of them.

You talked about once the book aktion.

Yes.

Tell me about that. What was the book action?

There was an order of the Germans to take away all the books. And so we order the clandestine to instead of giving to the Germans the books, most of the books went clandestine to certain to the underground.

What about the dog and cat aktion?

What?

Dog and cat aktion?

Dog and cat aktions, yes. They wanted to the synagogue in order to hurt the feelings of the Jews and they order the dogs in the synagogue and there they were killed.

And left there. And they left there. Dr. Elkes. What kind of a man was Dr. Elkes?

He was an exceptional man. First of all, he was a famous doctor, a physician, but he was a great Jew and very devoted to his people. And he didn't want to be elected as a chairman, but finally he was elected and he was the best choice that we could ever do. He was all the time head of the ghetto.

Do you remember being forced to go to a bar mitzvah of the Zussman? Do you remember that?

Oh, yes.

Tell me about that day.

Well see, I was in the office of the ghetto. And then I got a call from the ghetto reichstatten, the ghetto workshops that came really from the stat commissar and they asked that I should come immediately to the workshops. So I went from the eldestrat to the workshops. On the way a man caught me by the hand and they didn't let me go. Here's what happened. You have to be by my son his bar mitzvah and you have to drink l'chaim. And he didn't let me go until I sat down and read the barucha. It was very moving.

Were they very religious people?

They were. People are religious, people are not religious. Bar mitzvah is not a matter of religious.

But were those particular people?

Yes.

They were.

And were they happy? How could they be happy in the ghetto?

Nobody was happy in the ghetto. Nobody. It was cut off of the entire world.

The ghetto changed to a concentration camp. Tell me about that.

Well, this was more a stronger close over and restriction of the movements and so on. It was stricter restrictions.

And the SS came in then and what did they do to the Jewish committee?

Later on the Jewish committee was liquidated because they had no functions. But still they existed.

Underground.

Yes.

Resistance. So people fought back.

Yes.

And so tell me about food. Was there enough food?

Food? There was never enough food in the ghetto. And we always used to go to the city to work. People were supposed to walk a certain way through the gates. They used bring back food. On the gate they used to take away parts of the food that they didn't allow to go in to the ghetto. It was a very hard situation.

Wood, firewood.

Yes, of course. We got a load to put in fire with a certain quantity, a very small quantity, but on the same family we clandestinely;y brought in the ghetto much more firewood.

Was it dangerous? Could people be killed for smuggling?

Of course, but we were very careful bypassing the gates of the ghetto.

Did people burn furniture to keep warm?

Yes.

Tell me about it.

My wife, she took our wonderful furniture and she burned it to warm a room in the ghetto.

The Jewish committee. Tell me how it was formed.

Well, the Kovno ghetto was the only one where the Jews themselves elected their committee with Dr. Elkes as head of the committee.

Were the police, the Jewish police--

Of course.

Tell me, were they are good?

The Jewish--

[TELEPHONE RINGING]

Avraham, you buried things in the ghetto, you hid things.

Tell me about that.

Well, I buried things in the ghetto in order to keep it from the Germans. You understand? So I kept it in the clandestine. And then after the ghetto part I found, part I didn't found.

You went back how soon after the ghetto burned? When did you go back?

When the ghetto was liquidated we all left.

You went back--

The ghetto was burned in the little part of the ghetto. The ghetto was a smaller part and the bigger part and they burned in the smaller part of the ghetto. Yes.

How soon did you go and dig up the diary?

As soon as the ghetto was liquidated.

Tell me about digging it up.

I went to the places where I was hiding it about 2 meters below the earth. And I dig it up in 4 places. I had to dig it up in 5 places, but in two places I couldn't reach because it was ruined. So only three places. I could dig it up.

OK. Did you bury it inside jars, or what did you put the diary inside to bury?

Just plain wood, plain cartons. Tell me about--