

-TITLE- Henry Kravitz
-1 DATE- 9/14/89
-SOURCE-USHMM San Francisco Temple Beth Shalom
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND QUALITY- Good
-IMAGE QUALITY- Good
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES- English
-KEY SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC NAME-
-PERSONAL NAME-
-CORPORATE NAME-
-KEY WORDS-
-NOTES-

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TAPE 1

- 1:01:00 Henry was born Dec. 14, 1923, in a small town in Poland, 18 kilom. from Warsaw., population 25,000. His father had a building material, coal/fuel business. It was smallish but prosperous. There were 3 kids in the family, a younger sister and a brother.; approx. 30-40 other family. It was a nice Jewish life, many clubs, Zionists & Revisionists. He went to the public school, it was the #3, a Jewish school.
- 1:02:30 Always anti-semitism, Poles only good to Jews when needed as in their small businesses and professions. They heard about Hitler and didn't believe what was on radio. When Henry was 14 or 15, he was in school in Warsaw (one year) and was plagued by Polish kids. His belongings constantly tossed etc. In 1938 Jews came to Warsaw from Germany, they were put up in synagogues, aided by Polish Jews.
- 1:04:45 Fri, Sept. 1, 1938, 11 A.M., war came to Poland. Heard airplanes, thought it was maneuvers, they began to strafe. Radio said war, people ran to the roads, they were killed. Henry's mother killed, buildings bombed, homes destroyed. He found his mother with head blown off. They went to cemetery to bury the dead, machine gunned and strafed; no place to hide, no where to live.
- 1:06:15 Father and kids moved in with an uncle whose wife was killed. At City Hall they went for jobs, got beaten, spit on, given the lowest, menial jobs. Did it to survive. Polish kids would accompany German soldiers to point out Jews (otherwise Germans couldn't ID them) taunted, humiliated, beat and worse. They worked as tanners, soldiers would push them with gun butts so they fell head, face first into wet dye on skins. It would burn horribly.

- 1:09:10 Milk & potatoes incident: little sister brought him lunch of measly milk and potatoes. A German soldier asked how he could survive on such slop. Why not leave and go across the border to Russia. "We'll kill you...all of you". He tossed him an apple. A turning point for Henry. He confronted his 42 year old, broken father. Let's gather our pitiful resources and go to Russia. No. His father, an Orthodox (not Hasidic) Jew. said he didn't want to be a Communist. Henry said he could no longer live like they were. OK, go, said father.
- 1:13:10 Headed for Malkenia (?) town on border Poland/Russia. Found 10,000 people caught between 2 armies, Russian/German. A cousin, wounded Polish vet managed to walk across on crutches. Some Russian officers on horseback came and suggested they put women & kids at head of group, push forward; troops would shoot over heads, they'd claim couldn't stop them. They did, it worked, got on train to Bialystok, nice city; uncle had factory there. Found the "capitalist" had been thrown out. Henry got factory job. Said Kaddish for mother. lived there 3 months with relatives. Warm, OK.
- 1:16:05 Feb. 1940, got letter from sister, come home, father sick. Changed rubles to zlotys, back to border. Germans played "shoot the Jew". Frostbitten hands. Dirty, found border closed. Struggled back. Never a Communist only a follower of Jabotinsky. Got back. thru summer of 1940 not too bad. Survived.
- 1:18:15 October, 1940, ordered out of town to ghetto, old summer resort. Sold belongings to Poles, 1 family to a room Jews put up barbed wired; had Jewish police inside, Polish police outside, visited by all manner of German police.
- 1:20:00 A cousin suggested Henry for role of mailman. One of several jobs that functioned in & out of Ghetto. Opportunity to scrounge for food etc. Everyone wore a white armband with yellow star of David 8x10 centim. Little sister, afraid he'd be shot (many couriers were, on whim) threw away papers. He did work with a couple of others who brought corn to be ground (200lbs. at a time in coffee grinder) and made into bread that was sold outside. They got bread in return. It was dangerous. Incident: 2 black booted Germans spotted elderly lady outside ghetto selling Kosher chickens. They got off horses, approached 5' tall woman, she cried, they ordered on the ground, shot her thru heart, blood everywhere. "We wasted 2 bullets on a dirty Jew, you, (to Henry) come here, carry her inside, I want 2000 zlotys for each bullet". Money always on hand for such demands in Ghetto. He did as told, then they buried her.

- 1:26:25 Kids on one side of wire, soldiers on other. Sometimes shot a little Jewish kid for kicks. They'd laugh. Germans called all Jews Communists. 1941, bad times. Typhus. While whole families sickened not that many died.. They were told it was a Hitler experiment. At this time, Treblinka. 100 Jews a day were recruited for track work. It was 60-70 Kilom. away. The Poles told of loud military music and machine gun fire. The ovens were built after. They didn't know truth about Treblinka. Worked under guard, saw trains go and come back empty. Found pictures, letters, notes, all from Jews.
- 1:32:50 People volunteered for the trip. They thought it would be good. Work, build, survive. Henry & friends bribed Polish guards to stop train, they listened, heard Jewish prayer, cries. Saw a train coming from West. People asked about the "good Treblinka". These were fancy dress people, eating French bread. There were Ukranian gurdas called "The gang who finishes them off", they warned not to reveal a thing or death for them.. So all thru the summer of 1942 the trains rolled, day and night, from west, from east, to Treblinka to the ovens. Then Himmler got scared and ran 24 hours a day.
- 1:37:25 Some Jews escaped the box cars, lived with villagers. Nazis needed Jews for labor. Had a factory (Jewish owner shot, A Mr. Stuttman). They made parts for tanks and guns. Jews thought they were safe, silly. Lunch frequently test-tube fruit. 100 out every day, maybe 98 came back. They needed to shoot some Jews always. 5000 Jews in Ghetto. Judenfrei were only ones allowed out. Sister used to wait at gate for him to return.
- 1:42:15 Simchas Torah. Warned by a Pole he knew. That to be night of evacuation of Jews. Celebration stopped. Father divided up money. Little brother (?) Henry thought could survive with him. Henry had passports made for others thru contacts. Henry had no money left for one himself, but had a faked christening paper given him by church out of gratitude for money he raised. The name on paper: Henry Wozniak (?) meant horse rider. Sister, now 12 or 13, like a little mother. Odered Henry away by himself, better chance for survival. She kept little brother. They separated, he went with 2 other boys, one now lives in Chicago, the other died in Auschwitz.
- 1:48:00 September, 1942, 1- p.m., headed back to village, 3 Km from ghetto. First met a Poledeutscher, ordered to return, "You're Jewish", even tho he had worked for his father. Sneaked out early A.M., sheltered by Polish family, given bread, wurst, milk. Didn't eat the wurst (still Kosher). Heard screams. After found Jews killed on road to Wolomi (?) and Radzimi(?) the rest went to Treblinka. Farmer took them to swampy area to hide. Feared Gestapo. They relaxed in sun.

- 1:51:30 At 8 p.m. heard screams. "ZHIDZE" pitch forks, knives into brush. They ran for their lives leaving belongings including shoes; except Henry. he had kept his on his feet. Henry decided to buy train tickets for all to East Russia. First negotiated for shoes with another Polish farmer. He gave him 2 old pair, no money, had pity & friendship.(knew his parents). Henry as spokesman. He spoke as a Pole, no accent. Said they were traders, butter, eggs etc. Suggestion: go Jew hunting, more money in it. Back to friends, told them jump on train, pretend strangers.
- 1:55:15 At the stop past their hometown, Polish students abroad with Gestapo. Jew hunting. They ID'd accurately. Girl sitting next to them targeted. She was daughter of the "schoicet". Denied she was Jewish to no avail. They bayoneted her arm and pushed her from the train. The other-Jews rounded up were summarily machine gunned to death in front of the train.
- 1:57:50 Arrived in Malkina at 4 A.M. surrender tickets, more Jew hunting. It's curfew. Walk to old German/Russian border. still curfew, back to station. Find 50 people wrapped in barbed wire, thrown on train to Treblinka. All non-Jews happy, laughing, cheering. Jump on small train to get away. ask Pole how to get to border. "20 marks, I'll take you" Henry says, "first get there, then I'll throw you the money". Done.
- 1:62:00 Stop at first Jewish town before Lumza(?). No one believes horror tales. Gave them new names. Work on the autobahn using machines to break up concrete. Miserable. Group leaves, then splits
- 1:65:00 Henry stays in an Anitepka type town (poor) a free Jewish village. They wait for the Russians. Henry asks for & gets place to stay with family in coffee shop. Elders of village get him job unloading stone coal, 10 tons per day. Promised money. Never get it. Is well fed by girls, he's the orphan mascot. Autobahn work for German co. Kammeralenz - Bromberg. Crush stones, great lunches. 6 days a week work. Village keeps money, none to Henry. He wears no star. Spots a Polish policeman he knows. Alarmed. Is told the village is to be evacuated that night (autobahn work finished). Henry warns villagers, he's not believed. Flees to the woods. At 11 p.m. that night, machine gun fire. the village is destroyed. Some other Jewish boys & girls meet him in woods. (22 in all). They stay for 2 days, then split. Henry will use his christening paper to pass as Christian.

- 1:75:00 Hides in holes, lice infested, shares space with field mice. End of October, 1942. Feet are swollen, never removes shoes. Almost gives up to Germans. Goes to one village Kulesha Nitefka (?) volunteers to be exchanged for a Pole in Germany doing hard labor. Has papers, show he's not Jewish. Come back in a few months. Next town, he tells farmers (calls on them at night) he's ex smuggler. Asks to be exchanged and go to Germany for a few marks. Family insists he's Jewish but let him stay in barn, feed him.
- 1:78:00 The farmer's wife is very kind, their son, Joseph is Henry's age. He is protective. There is an incident with a Gestapo member and a Jewish woman, Henry remains stoical. It becomes clear he must leave. On to the next village. He reads notices posted that all males born around 1922,23, must sign-up to dig foxholes on Russian front. (Series of uninterrupted monologue follows)
- 1:85:05 Henry has become friendly with the Burgomeister, is given permission to apply for passport. He has convinced his farmer that otherwise he will be picked up and accused of being either Jewish or an escaped Russian prisoner. This is in city of Zamberra (?) They pass an auction of Jewish household effects, Henry plays dumb. At the German high command office, they get an interpreter. Henry states his wish for papers, and declares willingness to go to Germany "of his own free will" to work. Come back after New Years. On Jan 5 or 6 he returns. The man in charge is so impressed, he personally signs, also gives him a letter to his wife, recommending he be hired for their farm in Germany if he is unhappy with where he is placed. This is Henry's "ticket to life".
- 1:88:00 May, 1943, request for a trade: a healthy Pole for a sick Polish sergeant. Place, Hanover, Germany. Henry is ready. Instructs farmer's wife to prepare 3 packs, each with bacon, eggs, cheese. He will deliberately arrive at each examining point later than expected so that he can avoid undressing and revealing his circumcision. It works, and in each instance he leaves a package with official who pushes him through. This is the town of Lumza. Seated on a partial brick wall, he is informed that it is the site of the old ghetto. Henry refuses to take the train to Warsaw, the more direct. He pleads the uprising (Ghetto) has stirred to much unrest. He actually fears recognition. Farmer buys ticket at extra zlotys to go thru Koenigsburg. It is the local. Henry leaves, clothed in a farewell gift of a black coat with fur collar, tho it's the wrong season. The first stop is the town his mother was born in, Strelenka. Some guys find out he's going to Germany on a trade, suggest he's underpaid, make a deal for him to come back in 3 months and work with them for higher fee, \$5000 marks. Posnan, 1½ days, a Judenstrasse left, no people. In Berlin seem to be Jews with yellow stars working. Ask for train to Hanover. Treated well. Directed to small track. It is summer. arrives at destination around 7:30 p.m. curfew. Given pass after intervention of Schneirheide (Yugoslavian who speaks German/Polish). Arrived at farm, 9:30-10 p.m. Everyone happy. Stayed 3 months.

Always fearful, Henry, living with a pleasant Pole, good looking,
IS AFRAID ^{of} HIS AFFAIR WITH a German officer's wife is more
than he should know about. Asks to be re-assigned, tho not to
a munitions plant. Farmer knows Henry saw him chop his finger
off in threshing machine to avoid serving on Russian front.
Also, Henry re-asserts he is there of his own free will, not
slave labor. O.K., he is sent to Burgomeister.

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TAPE 1₂

2:1:05

On camera, a snapshot of Henry Kruger in 1944, 20 years old, in Germany, wearing an English uniform with a P for Pole on it. Two more photos are exhibited. One, mother, Elena Pirnekaewz(?) taken in Warsaw. Mother was killed at age 39. The second photo, little sister Luba Kruger, age 9 or 10. She was killed a few years afterw. Pictures unearthed in Israel. Henry makes reference to a book and tapes made 4 years prior to this interview. It is in Rahovet, Israel, he and other survivors of his hometown raised money and put up a monument to those who died. Of 5½ thousand, 30 left.

2:4:50

Found a place for Henry in Nieder Saxon area, nice Pole. Stayed til end of war. The man had been a prisoner of war in WW1, had compassion. A hunchback dwarf, all German and mean also worked there. One day, the two went out to dig for potatoes. The man gave him a pitchfork and ordered him to kill the mice in the potato burrows. Henry refused, remembering they were his companions when he was starving and hiding out in woods surrounding Polish farms...the dwarf hit him with his incredibly powerful knuckles and dislocated his jaw. In howling pain, Henry put his face against a wall and forced his jaw back in line. He abruptly left, went back to the farm. Did his chores and went on a hunger strike.

for

2:9:00

This was 1944, things were more lax, tho hunger strikes were unheard of. This went on for several dys (tho the Poles sneaked food to him). He dressed to go to town to employment center. The dwarf threatened him with a luger. Henry ignored it. Also threatened to send him to a munitions factory. No response. Off to town. Henry on the offensive, yells about his rights as "free will labor", shwos black & blue face. Everyone agrees never to pair the 2 again. They all like Henry. He is never drunk, never sick with VD, kind to the animals, sheltering them from air raid attacks.

2:11:15

Signs posted, ask for volunteers to dig foxholes against on-coming Allied armies. Henry is refused. They figure he'll defect. April, 1945 defeat imminent. Soldiers try to sell clothes. Poles don't buy.

- 2:12:20 Sudden quiet. No sounds of artillery. The helkp are fed fancy food. French prisoners of war are only source of news. They tell them where is front is. After lunch, Henry & friend go to bunk to nap. There is a terrible roiling, shaking noise. Henry goes out and spots a tank with a white star. He's confused, asks if Germans have changed tanks. Gets friends, they go out to look. It is April 15, 1945. Approach tank, stop from shooting, yell in Polish. A Polish speaking officer is summoned. The soldiers are British. They are urged to accompany them on a German search mission. No, they reason, we've come too far too long, to possibly die now. They are given tommyguns, go to village.
- 2:18:15 An incident occurs where they use their guns to prevent villagers from stealing their bikes. They are told to steal from the Germans. The villagers are Polish National Guardsmen. This occurs on the day Bergen Belsen is freed. For the following 5 weeks Henry does nothing but eat, drink, enjoy. They are shipped to a fancy camp. In the process he intervenes to save Burgomeister, makes him feel good. He's in the camp a few weeks, it is Russian. Poles tell there are Jews there, he is stunned, thought none had survived.
- 2:22:00 Soon leaves and goes to Hanover. Dressed in uniform (as in photo) he also wears a star of David. An elderly lady approaches him at a bus stop. She touches star he is insulting and angry, she cries. He is en route from the Bahlsen cookie factory, taking broken ones to camp for kids. Apologises to lady, learns from gentleman she too is Jewish. He is invited to her home and discovers she lives in a bombed out apartment with no roof, just umbrellas. Her husband was Director of Hanover's Police Academy. He speaks perfect English, is very cultured. Henry determined to find them better housing. He approaches a friend, Mr. Busch asks where old Nazis may be living in a nice area, explains. Henry commandeers a jeep and some Control Commissioner agents, go to Nazi aptment and order him out. Within days, the elderly couple, the Aarons (?) are living there. They invite Henry to share the space. With misgivings, he does. It becomes a happy arrangement. He stays with them until he leaves for America 1949, day before Memorial Day. Called the woman "Mutti". He continued to send packages to her, she died at 92.
- 2:25:50 Henry credits his survival to a new way of thinking...like the chalutzim, like the Jabotinskys. Don't give up, fight. Don't let them persecute you, fight for your rights. Survive.