

RG-50.477.0813

Summary

Mikhail Felberg's interview was conducted during the 50th anniversary of the events that happened in the fall of 1943, the interview (part 2) was conducted in October of 1993.

Mikhail was born in November 1929, in a village Bar, Vinnytsia region of Ukraine.

Parents: father- Boris, mother- Haya, grandmother - Honda.
His parents were not educated people. His father worked as a worker.
His grandmother died before the war.

Before the war Bar was a small village, about ten-twelve thousand people, including Ukrainians, Polish people and Jews. Relationships between different nationalities were good. the villagers were primarily poor, they lived in small houses and produced their own fruits, vegetables. People had no money for clothes or even local travel.
People had disagreements, but nothing serious. Mikhail remembered that children and adults invited him to celebrate Ukrainian and Polish Easter, while he invited Ukrainian friend to his house during Jewish Passover.

Michael talks about drastic changes that happened in people of his village when the war started.
Mikhail went to a | Russian school; at home his parents spoke Yiddish; he was fluent in Yiddish.

Michael had an older sister Ida, who left home to go to the teachers' institute in Moscow before the war and a younger sister, who was about three years old at the beginning of the war.

Mikhail feels that it is his duty to tell his story about his life and other Jewish people from Bar. He thinks that there is no true account of the events that happened in Ukraine during the war.

Mikhail remembered that On June 21, 1941 he went out of the house to see his friends. On the corner of the street he saw about 20 people gathered at the radio. He remembered that Molotov announced that Germans attacked Soviet Union without a warning. People couldn't believe it.

They were told at school and they heard on the radio, that world capitalists wanted to attack the Soviet Union; but the Soviet people had nothing to worry about because, the Soviet Government and the Soviet Army will defeat any aggression. The people in the village heard about German Government persecution of Jews in Germany, but they couldn't really believe it because, Germany was associated with great musicians, writers, poets.

The next day the Soviet Army started recruitment of men. His father was almost deaf, so he was exempt. Jewish men tried to join the army and go fight the enemy. Many Ukrainians who were

enlisted came back. Later when the Soviet army liberated the region, men from Bessarabia tried to insist into the army, but they were not yet the citizens.

The villagers started thinking about leaving Bar, but the local administration ordered people to stay in the village. Only high-ranking officials, and party members received special permission for evacuation. Weeks later people were allowed to evacuate, but they had no options: no horses with wagons, and no money.

On July 16 1941 the German troops took over Bar. They organized commandant's office, established new rules: all villagers had to give up their weapons, their radios, and the Jews had to wear yellow stars on the front and back of their clothes. Right away new type of people emerged; alcoholics, people who came from prisons, were ready to work for the German commandant. In about two months the Germans ordered all Jews to move to one area in the village - a ghetto. It was surrounded by the barb wire and special guards. All Jewish people were ordered to move to the ghetto and stop all communications with other people. There were about four thousand Jews in the ghetto at that time.

All relations that were established during hundred years of living in one community were destroyed. The Germans made it very clear that the Jews were bad, they were not worth living, and that the Ukrainians were good.

In that ghetto there were no food stores, no pharmacies. Risking their lives Mikhail and his father tried to snick out to exchange anything they had for scraps of food. Children helped their families. The houses that were left by the Jewish people outside the ghetto were taken by the Ukrainian villagers, who had no obligation to pay anything to the people who were by then inside the ghetto living in terrible conditions, sometimes 10 people in one tiny house. In about two weeks the Germans started sending Jews to work. Everybody who could move had to work. Although work was very hard it gave many people opportunity to get some food from the outside by exchanging their belongings: an old earring, a spoon, piece of good cloth, etc. Local policemen enforced that order. In a couple of months people in the ghetto started dying from starvation. The atmosphere in the ghetto became unbearable, Germans and Ukrainian policemen had total control; they used to go to the ghetto, grab women and even girls and rape them; people who showed smallest resistance were beaten and shot.

Mikhail remembered a story when three German solders decided to shoot the dog that played with children just for fun.

During the first winter of 1941-1942, the majority of people had some food saved. Ukrainian local papers were proclaiming that poor condition of Ukrainian people was caused by the Jews and the communist. That propaganda was effective, many people who used to be friends became enemies. Very few people tried to help, the vast majority was supportive of elimination of Jews. The policemen could understand Yiddish and easily gathered information. There was nowhere to run, because there were no partisans in that area.

Mikhail and his father worked at the sawmill. When Ukrainian nationalists realized that their abuse had no consequences, the life of Jewish people became terrible. People were dying from hunger, from disease, and hard work.

The ghetto was supervised by the Germans and the local policemen. The Germans established Judenrat - a Jewish council, that had to implement their orders. Josef Krahmaleck was in charge of their ghetto. He and his group had to follow the orders, it was better than having the Germans in the ghetto.

The teacher of biology Kuliveprik, Vladimir Andreevich, became "a mayor" of their ghetto. He always acted in anti-Semitic way towards his students. He only executed orders given by the German commandant.

The head of police - Andruciev, was caught in Romania in the 60s and he was later persecuted.

Mikhail remembered that people in the ghetto tried to focus on helping people who had no food, or were very sick. Although they had a doctor and a nurse in the ghetto, they had no medication. People were dying from starvation. His parents were relatively young, 45 and 40 at that time.

Before the war there were two synagogues, one was closed by the Soviet Government, in the 30s, but a small one remained in the ghetto. The older people encouraged celebration of holidays even in the ghetto.

Mikhail revealed that on August 19 1942 Germans executed two thousand eight hundred Jewish people in Bar. Among those people were his mother and a four- year old sister. Mikhail and his father were able to escape. (the details of that period were not included in the interview). Mikhail remembered that the first group of Jews was killed in Bar on the northern side, and then during the "second action" people were shot and thrown into the ditch three kilometers from Bar in village Ivanovich.

One man helped Mikhail and his father to escape, his father knew him before the war.

For five days they were hiding in hay without any food. Then they started walking towards village Ivanovich. They met people on the way who gave them some food and shelter.

They arrived to Kepyagorod, a town under Romanian control early in the morning. They entered the ghetto they found Yousel Kodner, who was the distant relative on his mother's side. He was at home, and there were other relatives who escaped Bar. However, he already had 8 people, and that there were no room for them. He gave Mikhail's father a rug and a half of a loaf of bread. Mikhail and his father found shelter in a shack on the outskirts of the village among other refugees who came from the German side and survived massacres. There was practically one room where they found about 10 people, but they let Mikhail and his father stay with them. There was no water, no electricity, just bare floor and they had wood from broken houses for heat.

Every day his father was looking for food. Jews from Bessarabia, who stayed in that ghetto, had some privileges, they were able to bring their possessions and money to the ghetto. They were able to rent better homes, buy better food. Jews with money used poor Jews to work for them for food and that helped Mikhail and his father. Sometimes his father gathered frozen root vegetables from the fire lids. Mikhail was sitting at home, because he had no shoes.

One day his father found aunt Freyda, who was able to escape from Verhovka with her daughter Polya and her husband. Their sixteen year- old son stayed longer with his girlfriend Nehama, but their "friends" betrayed them to the police and they were killed.

Aunt Freyda supported Mikhail and his father, as her husband fixed shoes and had some food to share. Mikhail remembered, that they were starving, one of his friends Grisha Bilik, a 14 years old boy died from starvation, because he had no family to help him. This situation lasted till late Fall.

One day around five in the morning the house was surrounded by the local policemen and the Romanian soldiers. They were told that the Germans wanted Jews from their territories to be sent back. However, doctor Orenstein from the Judenrat payed the bribe and everybody returned back to their house.

In the early spring of 1943 the people in the ghetto, who didn't yet die from starvation and diseases, and were able to walk were transported to the concentration camp Tulchin near Nestervarka. In Nestevarka the Germans took several old stables, surrounded them with a barbed wire and made a camp. The camp was near turf supplies. The Germans destroyed an old synagogue and used wood for construction of an electric station that was supposed to work on turf.

Mikhail and his father were among about two and a half thousand people in that camp. The people were not shot, but they were not fed, the conditions were terrible, and many people died even before they started working.

After one month they were moved to the construction site. The work was extremely hard: they had to use special hammers to demolish the synagogue, built hundreds years ago. The guards were using rubber sticks and beat people on their heads, on the stomachs, whenever they wanted. Mikhail remembered one German engineer, he had one eye, he was a real sadist, he always was looking for somebody to beat to death. Mikhail remembered him and his face very vividly. People worked about 12-13 hours per day, and for that they received some soup or cooked corn and 100- 150 grams of bread made with scraps of vegetables.

In the barracks exhausted from work and hunger people still tried to communicate with each other telling Jewish jokes and stories. They had one young man, Yousel he was a composer, he knew many Jewish songs, proverbs, poems, fairytales; he wrote his own songs. He was a

phenomenal storyteller. His stories were like a symphony to their ears. Yousel sang folklore songs in Yiddish.

Mikhail never heard those songs after the war. in the life after the war. Mikhail sang several songs in Yiddish. The songs were sad, they included prayers, songs were about mother's without children and children without mothers.

(Mikhail would like to find a person, who would be able to turn his memories into real musical notes.)

Although the Jews in the camp were sick, dirty, hungry, and regarded like working cattle, they had real hearts, souls, they remembered the love of their families.

In the fall (October, November) of 1943 they heard the sounds of the approaching Soviet Army. They were afraid that the Germans would liquidate the camp, but they the German troops were leaving the area, they were no longer on a mission of killing the Jews. Mikhail remembered the German troops passing through in bad clothes, looking sick.

Mikhail thinks that at that time the Romanians were not sure of the results of the war, so they decided to close the camp and transport all the people back to the villages they came from.

Mikhail remembered that they put people on open trucks. They went through a major train station in an old Jewish shtetl Zhmerinka in Ukraine, that was occupied by the Germans. The Romanians wanted to hide the fact that they were transporting the Jews; therefore, they were told to lay flat on platforms and make no sound. The people were asking others to strangle them if they start coughing or sneezing. They were laying as if they were dead for 3-4 hours and they were saved. They were taken to the area about 30 kilometers from Zhmerinka and told to go to their villages to the ghettos they came from. Mikhail and his father knew that they shouldn't trust Ukrainians, therefor, they went back to their last shtetl.

They found the old shack with the same group of people in it. They tried to find jobs, they were running outside to gather any possible scraps of edible vegetables. They lived in that situation until winter of 1944.

On the 22nd of March, 1944 the Soviet army liberated them.

After 3-4 days Mikhail and his father and other people walked back to the village Bar. The village was destroyed, his house was demolished.

Mikhail and his father found jobs at the local factory, received some money and food cards. Young people received meals at the factory. A couple of weeks later they started receiving letters from his older sister, his uncle and relatives from Moscow. His sister was evacuated, then she returned to Moscow and started working.

They received parcels with clothes and food, because Michael and his father had nothing, they made pants from old bags.

In October of 1944 schools opened and Mikhail wanted to finish school and go to college. However, he couldn't do it, because he had to work to get food cards until his sister sent them money, that allowed Mikhail to stop working and finish eighth grade.

Mikhail remembered that he studied day and night to get good grades. At that time Mikhail realized that nobody wanted to hear about their suffering. On the contrary, people had an idea, that they survived because, they did something wrong, something bad. He was under suspicion of being a spy, a traitor. People in his village didn't wanted to hear the truth about Jewish story during the war. Although he was an excellent student at school and by then enrolled in a military program, he was rejected when he applied to the preparatory medical military school. Mikhail dreamed about that program, because, the Government payed for everything. Mikhail wanted to become a doctor. Three boys were selected including him and sent to the central committee for the final review, but the committee rejected him. He was so afraid of everybody, he never asked why he was rejected. However, one officer told him that mandate committee rejected him because of his family; his family; mother and sister killed by the Nazi, father was in Bar - he worked at the factory, relatives in Moscow had no political affiliations, the reason was simple - he was a Jew.

In the fall of 1945 he received a letter from his sister and his uncle inviting him to come to Moscow. It was very difficult to move to Moscow, he had to get permission from the local authorities, and it was impossible.

His father paid a bribe to the truck driver who put Mikhail on the truck that transported apples to Moscow and he left without papers.

Mikhail arrived to Moscow in 1945. He enrolled into the high school and completed two years in one year. With a high school diploma and excellent grades, he was able to go to the Medical school, despite growing antisemitism.

He wanted to study and studying was his life. He graduated Moscow Medical School and became a sergeant, later in 1976, he defended the dissertation and received a Ph.D. In medicine.

Aunt Freyda and her husband uncle Leib survived, he died in 1969. His cousin Polya, graduated school and university, she became economist, they lived in Chernovtsi. Polya immigrated to Israel with her family.

Michael suffered serious stomach problems all his life, his father had heart problems.

Mikhail got married, he had two sons.

His children graduated from the Institute of Transportation and became programmers. Everything seemed well in his life, but the fact that he was a Jew, he felt all his life. Despite the Holocaust, Jews in the Soviet Union were blamed for everything. The growth of antisemitism in 1990-1992 was so dangerous, that they decided to immigrate.

Mikhail thinks that to raise a good person takes a long time, but to raise a sadist, a monster takes no time.

His older son who lived in Kiev with his family decided to immigrate to the US, soon after the younger son left, then Michael and his wife moved to San Francisco in March of 1993.

Michael's father moved to Moscow after Michael, he was only 46 years old; he married again, he became a worker at the plant. He was a very intelligent person. He had only three years of school, but he had a passion for knowledge. His sister got married, she had three sons and she lives in Huston.

His older son works at Stanford University, younger son works as a security guard, while looking for a professional job.

Mikhail showed a picture where two thousand eight hundred Jewish people were killed and put into the ground in the village Bar; his mother and a four-year-old sister are among those people.

The picture was made on the 19th of August 1946, the anniversary of massacre of Jews in Bar. The people on the picture represent relatives of killed people. They collected money to put a fence around the common grave.