

-TITLE- Bernard Organeck
-I_DATE- June 13, 1990
-SOURCE- USHMM
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY- Excellent
-IMAGE_QUALITY- Excellent
-DURATION- 2 hours 33 minutes
-LANGUAGES- English
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES- SUMMARY FROM UNAUTHENTICATED TRANSCRIPT. ALL INFORMATION
FROM INTERVIEWEE, WITHOUT CORRECTION.
-CONTENTS-

Tape 1

1:01:55 Bernard was born in Gera(ph), Germany on February 2, 1923. His father was born in Poland. His father eventually was asked, by the police, to leave Gera, and he went to Lodz, Poland. The family eventually joined him there later in 1934.

1:03:54 Bernard's childhood was easy until Hitler came to power. Subsequently, Bernard was ostracized in school. His father was a successful tradesmen until he lost his house during the Depression. He rebuilt it, but was shortly thereafter asked to leave Germany because he supported the Social Democrats. Bernard's family consisted of his father, mother, older brother, himself, and a younger sister.

1:05:45 Although his father was very active politically, the persecution against their family was strictly anti-Semitic. His father's older sister had been active herself, and was a revolutionary against the Polish Czar and this is why Bernard's father and aunt left Poland.

1:08:22 In 1914 Bernard's father was inducted in the Russian army, became a German prisoner and escaped. In 1918 he married a native of Poland. Bernard's parents were both very politically active -- in fact the whole family was. They discussed Hitler's Mein Kampf but everyone dismissed it as the ravings of a madman.

1:10:15 Bernard and his siblings were never afraid as children, and he would fight back as he was very aggressive. Jewish kids, however, had to be careful about what they did or they would be

separated from their parents.

1:12:36The change came in 1933. There is a downturn in business, and Bernard's father was not supposed to continue to work. Bernard at this time went to public school, but in 1936 was removed from school. After 1933, his classmates treated him different and beat him. No one stood up for him, yet some of the teachers secretly did not support Hitler. They told Bernard that everything would be OK.

1:15:06The family moved to Lodz in 1934 to join the father's family. Living, for the family, was a struggle. Bernard started work at age 13, where he was apprenticed to a tailor. By 1939 Bernard was a qualified craftsman.

1:17:37In 1933 Bernard's aunt was an active Communist.

1:19:28Bernard was very family-oriented, and liked his life in Lodz. His cousins were like brothers and sisters. At this time there was little news of the Nazis.

1:22:04In Lodz all the Jews stayed in their neighborhood because the Polish sections were very dangerous. Children were easier to send abroad at this time, but lack of papers prevented Bernard's brother from going to Uruguay in 1936.

1:26:30Bernard's family read 3-4 newspapers daily, and knew all about the Nazis after Kristallnacht. When Bernard was 15 years old, 18 people lived in their family's apartment. These people fled from Germany. Jewish organizations helped people relocate into Poland from Germany.

1:30:18The poor Lodz community was further impoverished when these people arrived from Germany. His parents reaction to the Non-Aggression Pact was extremely anti-Russian as his parents were "left-liberal." The pact caused chaos in the family as many members had been supportive of the Communists.

1:33:36Bernard first felt at risk in 1939 when Germans marched in 12 days after the war began. There was no bread available, and Bernard and his brother were pulled out of a bread line by an MP. Bernard relates the story of being told how to work with his hands, and that he and brother had to carry stones and dig a ditch with no tools. His hair was butchered by the MP.

1:36:54 Bernard and his brother were put in a room with no food, but when the guard left they escaped and ran home. Bernard and brother took their yellow bands off and took a train to Warsaw. They then walked to the Russian/German border where a Pole helped them cross-over to Galistock(ph) by train.

1:39.45 Here they lived in the streets and made a living by waiting in line and selling their bread. Everyone spoke Yiddish in Galistock so there was no language problem.

1:43:45 They wore the clothes on their back day and night for 6 weeks in Galistock.

1:47:45 Once, Bernard's brother tried to get back to Lodz but was stopped at the border and beat badly. He and others were put in a deserted parcel of land. Eventually these thousands broke free, and Bernard's brother returned to Galistock. They ate only bread and onions there. An employee at a coal mine offered the two of them jobs, and they accepted.

1:50:53 The mines were in Wernaya Gubacha, a city in the Northern Urals near labor camps which supplied the mines with wood. The mine workers, however, were unaware of the camps. Initially they were treated fairly well, and were even given tobacco. Bernard gave his away, however, sacrificing his only form of currency.

1:53:36 This mine was 80 years old. Everyone lived in a house, and each person had a bed and a hook for clothes. A train took them to the mountain, and when one shift arrived the previous shift could leave.

1:57:33 Bernard's job was to carry dynamite down to the mine. This was a "light" job compared to production, where his brother worked. His brother did not do very well, and accordingly did not make enough to eat well. Eventually Bernard got sick, and the doctor said that he had to work outside on the surface.

2:01:23 The work he did "outside" was carrying trees down into the mine. He eventually escaped and visited an aunt in Moscow. Bernard eventually returned to the mine but conditions did not improve. His luck turned around when a foreman took him under his wing. In exchange for Bernard

buying vodka for him once-a-month, the foreman let Bernard sleep most of the time. A party was held once a month, and Bernard was forced to get drunk with everyone else.

2:04:03After a total of 7 months, they left and went to Purm(ph) on a river boat. They were caught and shipped back to the mine.

2:07:41Upon return, Bernard's brother was penalized 25% of his pay for an entire year. When their work contract came due, they were not permitted to leave until the year of penalty was over. Eventually they left and went to Moscow by train. In Moscow they were able to send food packages to their family, and later learned that 2 of the 5 packages arrived in 1941.

2:10:58Their diet improved in Moscow, but they could only dream of meat.

2:13:05Soon Russia was invaded. Although they joined the army and wanted to fight, they were not given arms because of their foreigner status. Their regiment was quickly disbanded anyway, and they were returned to Moscow.

2:16:49Moscow was chaos when the Germans were approaching. When they got within 15 km, the two of them took a train SE to get away from the cold. Thousands were being evacuated by train. Bernard and his brother violated the black market laws by reselling food to the people in the trains, but they had to survive somehow.

2:20:10The war severely crippled the Russian economy. Bernard and his brother were always worried about missing the train when they got off at the various stops. He and his brother planned it, however, so that no matter what they knew the train numbers.

2:23:51Cooperation among the travelers was high in order to keep families together. No matter what, Bernard and his brother knew they would meet up again in Tashkent. In Tashkent, Bernard got the typhoid epidemic after several months. It took his brother 10 days to find him in a hospital.

2:27:10When his brother found him, he sent Bernard some bread and jam which Bernard quickly devoured. At this time his diet consisted of bread and broth soup only. When he was cured they kicked him out, even though he could no longer walk very

well.

2:30:00When Bernard got out his brother got sick and went to the hospital. Bernard's friends helped him send food. Lack of vitamins made his brother night blind once out of the hospital. In May 1943 Bernard was caught without papers and sentenced to 2 years in prison camp. By luck his brother was arrested later in the month and purely by luck sent to the same camp.

2:33:30Bernard was the only tailor in camp, and this helped he and his brother survive. The camp had 600 men and 3000 women separated into different sections. Bernard got extras because of his talent.

2:36:10At one point Bernard made white suits out of spare mattress covers. He was put in a special prison within the prison for 10 days. A friend kept he and his brother together and sent them to another camp.

2:38:58The camp administration was all hard criminals. Bernard, his brother, and two others claimed they were tailors and remained at camp ITK 13(ph) while everyone else was shipped to Siberia. They were paid according to output. Bernard was very fast, and his brother very slow. Thus, together they survived.

2:41:49At this time their diet was bread and soup, with Bernard getting a little extra of each because of his output. Bernard made soles of shoes on the side and sold them to supplement their diet.

2:45:01Bernard forged rubber stamps out of tires to get extra meals. In the camp a radio blasted all day long keeping updates on the war efforts. At the camp all the Russian guards protected the perimeter, while the criminals ran the inside.

2:46:59Bernard was released on May 8, the day the war ended. Because of the celebration his release was delayed. His brother was released on the 17th.

2:50:33While in Russia they knew of the ghettos, but not of the camps. In Lodz he learned of the concentration camps. There, the owners daughter (of their old house) told them of the holocaust. He found out that his parents and sister were shipped out in 1942 for extermination.

2:53:17No one survived from the transports that his parents were on. His mother's cousin, and her daughter survived and told of the parent's story. In Poland after the war the anti-Semitism was unbelievable.

2:56:11Bernard doesn't trust Poles to this day, and Germans make him feel sick to this day. Once, after the war, he was at a demonstration. Germans on horses rode in and the Jews beat them near death. Bernard blames all Germans his age for the holocaust because they all supported the Nazis.

2:58:39Bernard tells a story of hearing someone on a bus ask "Why didn't Hitler kill them all?" Everyone on the bus jumped Bernard when he struck the person. Nevertheless, he absolves the younger Germans of blame because they were not alive at the time.

3:00:00Bernard tells of Russians in Berlin who questioned how Bernard got out of Russia. At the time he was in a Jewish community refugee center.

Tape 2

3:02:00In the American sector, where they subsequently moved, each family got a single room. He ran into his mother's cousin there. She (Casbow) (ph) lived with his parent's in the ghetto in the same room before they were shipped to the camps.

3:04:43When his father was called from the ghetto he went without any fight. In 1944 the rest of the family was sent to Buchenwald.

3:08:30This lady tells Bernard that his parents were so happy to receive the packages that he had sent from Russia. At his first post-war Hanukkah Bernard met his wife Yuta(ph) in 1947. Eventually he and his brother visited their place of birth Gera. The chief of police there got statements from them, and offered them German citizenship in compensation for their struggle. They walked out of his office.

3:11:22The chief felt they were ungrateful Jews. Some Seventh Day Adventists they met told them that everyone knew of the camps, yet were afraid to talk about them.

3:13:23Bernard relates a story of a woman in Gerard(ph) who hid a man for a long time. This man had no

prior connection to the Jewish community in Gera.

3:15:24 There were about 500 Jewish families in Gerard(ph). Jews never totally assimilated, so they had to take care of themselves. This community helped local or visiting Jews try to get to another country if they so wished.

3:17:36 Bernard married his wife once the Americans advised the Germans. On July 27th they married, and the next day they flew out on a coal plane. They were black when they arrived at Frankfurt.

3:19:13 In camp they waited for their papers. Bernard's diet was mainly peanut butter, which he still hates today. Some of the food was good.

3:22:20 Everyone in the camp spoke Yiddish. They were free, and the camp was more a home than anything else. Bernard mentions that his formal education stopped in 5th grade. He mentions also that his brother met a female survivor of Buchenwald in Gerard, and married her one month before Bernard married. Her name is Martha.

3:24:47 In Berlin he and his brother lived together. When his brother married she moved in also. Bernard and his wife married and left. They were sponsored by the whole San Bernadino community. His wife was pregnant upon arrival.

3:25:57 Bernard drove from New York to San Bernadino. He stated a tailoring business. His brother eventually arrived in New York, and his Uncle settled in Patterson, New Jersey. They were concerned with staying together as a family.

3:27:51 Bernard eventually moved to New York to be with his brother. His second son was born to Bernard in Brooklyn. His brother moved to Long Island, and Bernard moved to Yonkers. When his youngest son moved to San Francisco, Bernard followed in 1979 with his wife. His oldest son lives in Detroit and has a son himself.

3:29:39 Bernard and his wife like to tell their children of their experience. He feels it is wrong not to tell the new generation. He worries that it may happen again. Furthermore, he is against the unification of Germany. He feels they will be too strong in Europe, but admits that he is not one to comment. He says it is up to Bush

and Gorbachev.

3:31:41 Workaholism helps him forget his horrible experience. He just recently had a slight stroke last month and was in the hospital for 8 days.

3:33:16 Bernard believes that the tragedy of the holocaust should be taught in school. He feels lucky and says he survived relatively easy. It wasn't life-threatening on a minute-to-minute basis. He is better off in America than anywhere else... "but we never should forget, we never should forget."

End.