

## **Chaim Kozienicki** **Oral History**

I just want to say that when they announced that we would be put into the ghetto, I actually was glad that we will be separated from the Germans and my father will not be taken to work and we will be just among Jews. I was naïve then and that was my feeling.

In the beginning in the ghetto there was school and I went to the fifth grade and later to the sixth grade. We didn't have the same books as in school before. We learned Yiddish and German there, but school was actually as escape from the street and we received soup there and this was one of the most important things that we received soup.

When they opened the school in the ghetto we started to go. One of the most important things was that we received soup there.

Even while at school, I think I already started to work at night. During the day I learned and I went to our organization meetings and sometimes it was tough because apart from the meetings and studies and work, we had to stand in lines to receive food for the ration cards.

There was a library in the ghetto, I read many books. I think that every day I read one book. Every free moment I read. Of course I looked for subjects about Jews and Israel. There wasn't a book on the subject that I didn't read, but in addition I read all the world classics French, German, and Russian – Victor Hugo, Dostoyevsky, and Germans like Wasserman, Klarman, and Feuchtwanger. All these books, I just swallowed them.

What happened in the ghetto is that the parents were parents in theory, but in practice we all had to be independent. All the children from the age of ten were supposed to work and earn money and get rations. So in reality there were parents, there was home, but we were not dependant on us, we were already adults.

I wanted that my mother and father should feel how much I understand them that I was a child and an adult at the same time. I had the advantage that I went to the meetings of my organization. At the same time I didn't feel the hunger, I felt happy, I danced with everybody, I sang, despite that fact that I don't have a good musical sense. But I was happy and when I returned home I felt all of the sudden, I was hungry. Went I saw my parents I felt awful in my soul. I even wrote an article in our newspaper and the title was hypocrite. I thought of myself as a hypocrite that I can be within my group and not to be hungry and be happy and be a child again and when I returned home and saw my parents immediately I felt the pains of hunger and I saw them and my brother being swollen from hunger. Then I really started to feel hunger myself....I had guilt feelings that when I am with my friends I am a child again and when I returned home I was on old man just like my mother, father, and brother.

I was afraid that my parents would die.

Yes in actuality it was my grandfather. He was very old and observant and he prepared me for my Bar Mitzvah. I learned the proper weekly portion, which was red heifers. He taught me how

to put my tfilin on, but when the day of the Bar Mitzvah arrived grandfather couldn't come. He was already too swollen and wasn't able to come. Anyway, we on that day got up early. I put on the tfilin and I said the blessings. This was at home before work because we had to go to work on time. Whoever didn't come on time to work was punished and didn't get the soup. WE all worked. I worked in \_\_\_\_\_ workshop and my brother worked in the metal workshop. Father worked in the woodworking workshop. Mother worked in corsets workshop. So we had to come on time to work and we had to get up on that day earlier than usual. This was Monday and I put tfilin on. I said the blessings and received (choked by tears). I received as a gift from my family half a loaf of bread. They wanted me to eat it right there and then in their presence and I refused because I knew what was the source of this half a loaf of bread. They didn't buy it in the store, right? I couldn't even imagine for how long they saved from themselves in order to give it to me. I refused resolutely and they decided that I have to eat it and I ate it. We all were all on the brink of tears, just like now and I couldn't look them in the eye for a long time because I ate their bread. I swore that if and when I will survive the war and I will be a normal man and I will establish a family of my own and I will have a son who will become Bar Mitzvah. I will invite all the friends and I will let them eat bread as much as they want until the fullest. Later on in the organization I lost joy of life and for a long time I suffered because I ate their bread. Even in the organization they paid attention that I am not the same as I used to be. Of course I did not tell anybody, but this eats me up until today.

Nicely dressed people arrived. They spoke German...a woman from Dusseldorf came. She got our address and said that she has gift for us and I thought, we all thought, what kind of food we will get and then she brought some pin for my mother. We were so disappointed. He, Mr. Blumethal family, he asked, "where can one buy yellow cheese?" We heard this question in the ghetto. They suffered more than we did because we were already used to it because the hunger come in waves. They came suddenly to the ghetto and lived in the schools that were vacated. Many committed suicides and when there were deportations they were first to go.

We didn't know where are these people sent to, but we wanted to be together. Together was very strong in our family, with everybody I think. We wanted to be together. For example, my mother's sister received the invitation for deportation together with her family. It was her husband and two children, a girl my age and a boy seven years old. I even escorted them to the prison on Czarnieckiego Street. I escorted them. It was known that they are leaving the ghetto, but we didn't not think where they are going.

It started with that, that in general we had to come on time. People that didn't come on time received punishment and didn't receive soup. First I will tell about the fact that I lived right next to the fence and every night we heard people coming to the fence, mothers, fathers, young people, and older people. Coming to the guard and pleading "please kill me, I cannot suffer anymore and see how my family suffers from hunger," Or a woman saying "I cannot give anything to eat to my children and I cannot suffer anymore." More or less each time the same thing. Or people would approach the guard and started to sing. People lost sanity. One could understand that. I say that because when we came that day to work many people didn't come on time and that was strange. Later, maybe an hour or two later, a woman that worked with us burst in and she said that in early morning units of Rollkommando came. This was a unit of SS with long trucks, which they parked next to the hospitals and she told us about a specific hospital on

Lagewnicka 36, prison where there was a hospital for the insane. They came in the hospital and started to throw the sick into the trucks. They threw the children, babies that were just born including the mothers, took people from the operating tables. Threw them into the trucks and left the ghetto. When she told us this, I thought that I was in the ghetto for a long time and I knew that the Germans were brutal, but she went crazy. This was child's perspective, right? Because I heard next to the fence when people came and started to sing to the guard –this woman became crazy. I couldn't understand it and even somebody asked "so tomorrow we are coming to work?" because work was directly connected to the fact that at twelve we got food and at five we went home and it was important to come to work because we got soup there and because they distributed loaf of bread for eight days there. Two hundred and fifty gram of bread for every day. In my family we divided it. In the beginning the division was such, we divided in to four pieces, but the next day we paid attention that mother's piece was thicker or father or I paid attention. How come at night, my piece of bread became thicker? Each one wanted to give to the other. Then mother decided that if we all want to survive the war, we each have to eat our portion of the bread without giving it to the other. Every Monday, we took out the loaf of bread and divided it...there were people that were already incomplete and when they received a loaf of bread and they dreamt about it and they ate the whole loaf within a day or two and for six days or seven days they only had the soup, which they got in the workshop. That is why this was a big punishment because many people lived only on this bowl of soup. So this question whether we were coming to work tomorrow was relevant. When we left the workshop we went home and we saw the announcements in the streets that all the children up to the age of ten, all the old people to the age of sixty or sixty-five, and all the sick above the age of sixty-five have to leave the ghetto. I calculated in my soul that we are the ideal candidates for deportation because my parents were swollen from hunger. My brother was very tall was as thin as a skeleton and his whole body was covered with open wounds and I was very small. I didn't grow. So I knew that it is directed at us. I ran home and we prepared. We prepared a backpack and we decided at home that if God forbid they will take one of us, we will all go. In the ghetto, usually, when there were deportations, the Jewish police would get a list of the people and they would come at night to take these people and bring them to prison and later to the train station. They took them out of the ghetto. We didn't think what is happening with these people. Now we thought how to fill our stomachs despite the fact that they promised to the Jewish police that they would be able to save their own families. They did the job, but not at the pace that the Germans demanded. It was difficult to come to a family and say give me your small child, your baby, your sick mother, your sick father, the old one. They did it, but not at the pace that the Germans demanded and the Germans decided on general police hour. The Germans did the selection from home to home together with the police with the SS with wagons. And when there was the police hour then of course we couldn't receive the food with our ration cards, but we had a garden maybe 20 square meters. Every day we cut a little bit even the leaves and mother cooked it. In the meantime the selections continued from house to house. We lived in the last house next to the fence and each time we heard that they are getting closer. Even one day a policeman came and yelled "be ready for four o'clock in the evening, we will come to take." We lived to a house where there were nine inhabitants, I think and there was a wooden fence between us, but the fence was gone for a long time because it was used for heating. So anyway, at four from the adjacent house indeed they took one woman and two carriages with babies and took a chair and put on it a woman or man, I don't remember. I knew that this woman has more children. Apparently she hid them. Really at the said hour a wagon with a Jewish police came and took them and came into the

house. They searched and we didn't report because we didn't think. The next day we decided it was already a few days of selections and each time we heard that they are getting close to us and we decided that since we have no chance that we can avoid this deportation. We put our best clothes. I even put my mother's shoes on a little higher heel so I will seem taller. We prepared backpacks, but we decided that we will take out everything from our garden and we will eat the last time, the last meal: the last supper. That's the way we talked. I even in my imagination saw the last supper of Jesus Christ, that's what I saw when the food was taken out of the earth we had a few ripe potatoes, carrots, beets, and turnips, that's what we had. We took it all from earth including the leaves, we cleaned it, and mother cooked a huge laundry pot so there will be as much as possible that we should eat one time to the fullest. When it was almost ready, we almost put it on the table we heard close to us in a house bigger than our, we heard already shooting and barking of the dogs and yelling in German "Judenraus" and the aktion started. The Jewish policeman yelled in our direction "be ready the commission is coming." Because they called it commission. In an instinctive way, we caught our backpacks to get out and that moment my brother said, "actually I want to eat once to the fullest. We will first eat and then we will go. I don't care what will happen." And this was a brilliant idea. We sat down and started to eat. Next to us were yelling and shooting and barking of the dogs, you know? It was difficult to distinguish between the dog barking and screaming of the Germans. It all intermingled and we were so invested in eating. We were in an ecstasy of eating. We ate bowl after bowl. We emptied it all, all that mother cooked. When we were ready, we got up to go. Then I don't remember, either mother or father said "actually anyway they will take us. Let them come to take us. WE don't have to come out." And so they will not see that we are at home, mother and father lied in bed. My brother and I took our backpacks, we had a small corridor in our barrack, something like half a meter. We took the backpacks and that's where we waited for them to come and take us. I forgot to tell that we had a piece of bread. We divided it into four. That each one of us will have a piece in the pocket. So this will be for the road. When we sat there in the corridor I had such fear it ate me up. I felt that some worm is comes out of my belly and strangles me and then I remembered about the piece of bread for the road. Out of fear, I ate the bread and my brother ate his so we won't have for the road. I don't know how long it took, but anyway it was eternity. At certain times suddenly there was yelling an shooting as if it came down one octave and we waited some more. We didn't know how long. Suddenly, it was quiet and father looked out and saw that they left. \_\_\_\_\_ was the neighbor in the next yard and the neighbor said what a miracle happened to us. On German said to another, "we apparently already took from there." Okay he didn't say it so nicely, "these Jews so and so." Because they went from house to house the whole day and I assume that they noticed that open windows. One window towards the guard and one window towards yard where the aktion was going on. Apparently they saw through the two windows they saw the guard and saw that nothing is happening inside and they left. This was one of the miracles that happened to use because we were natural candidates for the deportations.