KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 1

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

Bob Silverthorne: This is an interview with Berl Zis-

man. B--E--R--L, Z--I--S--M--A--N. Sound roll 26 at

the head. Camera roll 53 at the head.

C: 53 marker 1.

Jim Ball: Hold on.

C: 53 marker 1, mark.

SB: First of all, tell me when and where you were born.

BZ: I was born in Kovno, in 19--in 1929...to a family.

I had 2 brothers, an older sister. My parents was

affluent. My father was a owner of a horse or course a

were the second largest in Lithuania. A normal reli-

gious family in Lithuania. We lived in downtown Kovno,

in Douchgutway, later we changed to Kovnogutway.

Nothing special, till 1939. Then things started to

change. With the war starting; the German, Polish. In

1940, the Russians marched in, confiscated the store.

We were already uprooted. At one time the are got wind

that the Russians want to come in and arrest us as

Burgoisers because we are rich people and wanted to

send us to Siberia. Once we got wind of it, everybody

left the house. The children were sent away to differ-

ent areas and when they came to get us, nobody was

home. I was sent away down the Namen, that was the

river there led to a town. I should go and shop for in

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 2

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

the market there. I told what to do and came--came

back 3 days later. And that's what the Russians were

doing. If they came home--came a place, where they

didn't find them, forget it. They talk go down and you

didn't know when will come back. But this time we were

saved. And that was after they confiscated the store.

In the beginning they put my father as a uh worker

there. He worked there for a few months and then they

chased him out. We had a lot of uh after we run. But

you had to have some kind of an occupation. Otherwise

you were already a criminal. So my father took an

occupation after being a watchman. That was the only

way he could get away without working on Saturday.

Later on, we saw that this wasn't the answer. We

opened what we call the little restaurant in our house.

We had a big apartment with a big dining room so we

made a little restaurant. Actually this was a cover so

you can--people can come in without doing any suspi-

cion. And between then they did a little business on

the side. If anybody strange or any stranger--anybody

unknown use to come in, everybody would sh--shocked

white. Nobody would say a word. And just eat a meal,

get pay--pay the big and then get out. That went in

19--that was 1940. Before the war--when the war broke

out. That was uh Saturday night or Sunday morning, I

remember that the Sunday evening we had a meeting in

our house and they had to decide. My father and a lot

of friends came in the house. Should we run or should

we stay and wait the Germans to come in. The--we did

not know the realities that those of the--the Kundamtra

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 3

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

because the Germans were in Vilna a day before than

Kovno. You know, they cut off any root to run away.

But even without knowing that, they decided not to run

because we hated the Russians to run because they were

no better than the Germans. So the decision was not to

run. Those who did run unfortunately didn't make it.

Uh, it was a couple months that the Germans sent us to

the ghetto. The Germans came in I think it was Wednes-

day morning or Tuesday morning or Wednesday morning in

Kovno. Um the time before went into the ghetto, they

use to come into my house--our house to pray in the

morning and they needed a median which called a

qur--quorum--10 people. So people even from the house

or from very close by, use to sneak into our house to

pray. When they were in middle of praying, they saw a

German officer comes in. I don't know what he knew but

he came to father and looked at the--the--the are in

the are gobbed with the film intelation. And all of a

sudden, he comes to us said, 'Do you have a Shohanora?'

Which is a uh actually the code of the Jewish Law. My

father was amazed that a German officer should ask him

a question like that. He gave--showed to him. He put

it back in the suitcase and left. It didn't take more

than 5 minutes. A whole group of German officers came

in and questioned, 'Was anybody here? Did he demand

anything? Did he ask for anything?' And that's when

again interrupted the players. They didn't say any-

thing and left. A few minutes later, a few big offi-

cers, high ranking officers--exactly I don't know what

the ranks were but they were higher ranking officers

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 4

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

came in and told all of us to get out to the yard. We

thought this is the end of it. We some tried to take

off their telations--their--their clothes and its film.

And it no--no--no do--don't--will--will--you should

not. Don't take it off. So we thought that this is

the end of course us the way we--we look. The put us

in the yard, put us against the wall. Take out cameras

and take pictures and told us all to get back in. This

was Vermacht officers. Of course they--they--ah--our

uh lives were on the line. We thought this was the end

of us. This is the--one of the first experiences that

I had with seeing the Germans. It didn't take long. I

think uh, in the middle of the summer and everybody was

supposed to find a place and get there. They designat-

ed an area and all of the Jews had to move there.

Looking around where to find a place to--to move wasn't

easy. The Lithuanians that had to move out from that

area weren't too happy either. However, my father had

owned a building. I think a 16 family house--what we

called a Greenenbahg--the 'Green Mountain' in Kovno.

And looking for a place, he found uh a uh Lithuanian

that had a 4 family house--a 5 family house--4 families

and an attic. And he said, 'How about making an ex-

change. Here I give you a big house--16 families--a

real income house for this little hut that you had

without whatever. Without uh

eh--eh--eh--eh--eh--eh--any plumbing and that's the way

they exchanged houses. So we found a little place in

the--in--in--in ghetto. There was 4 little apartments.

Each apartment had a kitchen and a room and a little

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 5

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Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

vestibule in front. And--and attic which was also the

couple of rooms. My uncle and the family--my aunt and

uncle and family took one apartment. We took another

apartment and the other couple families were there and

the arrangements were that I didn't know. That

the--they took the apartments. That's how we moved in

together.

SB: Do you remember what you took with you?

BZ: We took the bare necessities. We couldn't--we had

a big apartment and Kovnogutway Katavolika. The Kovno-

gutway number 14. And what we uh went--was only a

room--a two rooms; a room and a kitchen. So only what

we did necess--the most important things that we

could think of, we took along with us. Among the

things that we took with us was, somehow in a we had

a--a valise with wheat--namgut wheat. And my father

foresaw that in case we have to stay there through

Passover, he will need something to--to make--to buy

back Matsa from. So he took along that valise wheat.

That was among other things. Course, we took along a

uh--we had a uh as a potato men, bible and uh whatever

books. The most important books we took along with us

and that's how we went to the ghetto.

SB: Okay we have to reload.

(Cut)

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 6

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

BS: Go to camera roll 54. 54 is up.

(Cut)

C: Camera roll 54, marker 2.

JB: Mark.

C: Oops, second stix.

SB: Okay, go ahead and tell me.BZ: While we were look-

ing a place in the ghetto. I went along once with my

father. And that was what you call Slabotka. The

ghetto was a Slabotka. Kovno was like a peninsula. It

had two rivers on either side of the town. And--and at

the end of the town the two rivers met. The one river

was the Namen dead on the Valir. Slabotka was on the

other side of the Valir. That's where the Kovno ghetto

was. While going there to look for a place that we had

to move into the ghetto, we walked into some of the

abandoned houses that Jewish people leave before and

the blood that we saw in the beds; beds unmade; cribs

full with blood stains--in the cribs and that was right

after the Germans came in. The Lithuanians themselves

made sets of pogroms. They went through Jewish houses,

killing everybody--old, young, babies in the cribs.

That scene with the blood in the beds and blood in the

cribs--this I will never forget. And that was the

Lithuanian watsum--the--the--the Lithuanian murderers

that committed these things. Later, we have seen a lot

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 7

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

of other atrocities but that was one of the most horri-

ble scenes that I've ever scene even through--through-

out the--the Holocaust.

SB: When you moved into the ghetto uh, were you afraid?

BZ: Fear was not the--the--the--the question. We were

afraid everyti--every--every time we heard uh foot-

steps. The--the--the joke was that when the Germans

were coming because they--they are banging on it--the

way they were walking--you could hear for--for a block

away. Uh--uh--the only problem was in ghetto, in the

street that we live was not paved. It was scent and uh

but if you saw a German from 3 blocks away, you hid.

In ghetto itself, after it got some kind of an

amolity--whatever an amolity could be in ghetto. The

did have rations and they did ha--have--has--has to

supply the minimal of bread or whatever this the--the

minimal of uh. The never trusted incapable people to

man to the uh store, to watch the bakeries and so on.

My father, being a very honored an trusted individual,

capable businessman--they somehow favored him. I'm

talking the ghetto administration and gave him an

inside job. In other words, they should not have to go

out everyday from the ghetto to uh--to uh work. But

gave him a job, in the ghetto, because they needed him.

They needed somebody to trust who should administer a

uh a did--a--a--a store where bread was being divided

and given out on the rations to the people. So that

was my father's job most of the time; in the store and

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 8

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

also in a bak--later on a bakery. That he was the, so

to speak, the uh manager of the bakery to what was

going on. That nothing should be stolen. Nothing

should done un--unjustified.

Uh-and--and--they--they--they trusted him and he was

the--the taking care of that job. So that's enabled

him not to have to meat the German on the daily basis.

SB: And um what about humiliation to you father? Tell

me about his...

BZ: The humiliation--once while he was in the store,

behind the counter, a German came in. And through

seeing my father with a beard, pulled out his sword and

cut it off a half a beard. And he wanted to go further

but somehow from the outside, somebody called him, so

he left him like this. My father being a religious man

and didn't care, you know, that he would not give in to

their--so he would not even straighten out his beard.

Half of it was cut off--he took a scarf, wrapped in

around his face and that's the way he wa--he was walk-

ing, till the beard grow back. But he wouldn't cut it.

Bigger humili--humiliations then beatings and--and uh

spitting in the face--that's that was uh even worse.

Yes my uh--had cousins and other family that were

beaten brutally. I remember once specific--an older

cousin. I was at that time, 11--12 years--13 years and

a cousin that was uh 19 came with boros from head to

toe. A German--if somebody else probably wouldn't have

survived. This was a young fellow, strong fellow and

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 9

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

he was black and blue from head to toe. That's--that

was uh the Indania curse.

SB: Do you remember one of the early actions--the

Intelligencia Action?

BZ: That was uh in the Jewish uh calender, Marhusbin,

Ziemarhusbin--the 7th day of the month what we call

Marhusbin. That was the Big Actia. Everybody had to

go out on the--on the uh--the big open field and they

were selecting. Right--left--left--right. At that

time, the most of them were families. The didn't

take--the--the--they uh not as much breaking up fami-

lies but families on one side--families on the other

side. Fortunately we were selected on the right side.

The--those that were selected on the left side, the

pushed in to the--in the what you call the Klainagut-

ter. The ghetto was a big eh highway or what for there

it was a big highway, went through the ghetto. On one

side of the highway, was a smaller part, that was

called the Klainagutter. But being that the highway

had to go through the ghetto, so each uh--each part was

individually uh wired or--or uh fenced in. Those that

selected were taken in the small ghetto and the next

day, the morning, they took them to the 9th Fort

and--and uh killed them. At that time I understand the

uh 9,000 uh Jews I thing in the Great Actia.

SB: Do you remember that day?BZ: I remember the day

vividly. It was still dark outside when we went out

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 10

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

from the house. And we were standing there for hours.

The day was a dismal day. It was uh--uh--uh I

don't--was raining what was a cold uh damp day. And uh

stayed until late in the evening and then we were sent

back to the house. For my family, my uncle uh Mihnk's

family--only 3 children were left on the right

side--the right side; the rest of the family on the

left. So these 3 children later moved into with

our--with us in the 2 rooms. We had the the--the

kitchen in the room and the partitions of the kitchen.

These 3--these 3 slept behind the partition in the

kitchen. While we meaning my--my parents and two more

brothers, myself slept in one room in the other room.

It means at night, the room became one bed. 12 were

larger than a meter. And in the morning, they use to

put it together because they wanted to make a quorum, a

meeting in the house, even in ghetto. So the, every-

thing was posed on the side and the 10 people used to

come in and used to play down right there. Later they

took away the books so there was uh

they--they--they--they without the books, so we

had--they--they--we had to hide whatever we wanted

to--the--the--the few books that we kept, we had to hid

them that God forbid shouldn't see it and

then--then--then and that was biggest crime.

SB: In the Big Action, do you remember going past the

German during the selecting?

BZ: I eh--I don--it was very fleeting mom--moment. It

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 11

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

was a--go this way and that way we went. We didn't

uh--it wasn't that the uh we were uh looked over for

hours. I mean it was a fleeting moment. We came in the

line. Walk to the right--we went to the right and

that's it.

SB: Did you know--had you already figured out which was

the good side?

BZ: I did not remember figuring it out at that time.

But after a while, we are already realized that it

was--it was the--we are were on the right side.

SB: Okay we have to put another roll on.

(Cut)

C: 3 marker.

SB: And in the Big Action, when you talked before to

Paul, you told him that it looked like the people doing

the selecting and the guarding were enjoying their job.

Is that right? Laughing?

BZ: To them it was a joke. They're kidding around. Go

here--go there. I was like uh with--with smiles on

there faces and uh--and the biggest joke was that uh

people that did not know what was right and what is

wrong. People did not know what was happening. And

when the people wanted to go the wrong way and they

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 12

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

were laughing--they made it the biggest joke to them.

They did them a favor. Some--some people asked them to

go the other way because families were separated so

they uh--they was a joke. Ha ha you want to go there,

go ahead. They--they did them a favor. It was joke.

I don't remember exactly what of the few officers there

were there standing there and of course a lot of guards

and uh that way they it went--in went through. Eh--SB:

--and. Go ahead.

BZ: As a result of that eh Big Actia, what we called.

People realized that many times they--they--there was a

lot of other Actias but even before and after. That if

you're not there and you survived it, you have a

bet--better chance to stay surviving instead of going

to a selection. So what we started doing is make

hiding places; wuntas as we called. And of course not

every house or every place could or was suitable so we

teamed up with a neighbor across the street from us who

had a little house. And uh the uh water source was a

well in the yard and next to the house would be 10-12

feet away from the house was a barn. That we kept uh

wood if you had any--anything to keep there. So we

decided to dig up the barn, make like a--a uh bunker

underneath, cover it up with what ever wood we could

and cover it up with the dirt and uh dig a tunnel

because once you went into that little house the vesti-

bule had like a cold basement. I mean like it's a

poured cement. That was like a basement only smaller.

It was just uh under the vestibule. So they had a trap

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 13

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

door to get down to that place. The--the broke through

a wall in--in--in the cement, dug a tunnel from there

to the uh room that was actually underneath that barn.

Now they needed any kind of supplies. The--the wall

was very close by so they made it so that they took all

the first around from the well, covered it up and put

the well also into the bunker. Not nowhere and they

were taking water from our well that we had in the

backyard. By the Klay--Kinder Actia and that was

already forty ehh in '44. And then in Jewish date it

was 2 days the Kinder Actia. That was the 3rd and the

4th day of the month of Yessin. We were hidden there

in that bunker. However a parent of one of the people

of our neighbor somehow were found that somewhere else

and in order to be released or he'll thought he will be

released, he snitched on us so they let

should let him go. So the last--the second day of he

Kinder Actia, in the late in the afternoon, all of a

sudden they started banging on the wall because they

already found us out. They--they wouldn't of found it

unless somebody pointed a finger. And that is the one

who pointed the finger at us. They took us all out and

that when my father and my younger brother were taken

away. Before that, when I was about 14, that was means

2 years in the ghetto, they also realized that if you

have a profession or you're employed, you had a better

chance of survival--at least on a day to day basis. So

my father put me in the Klainerverstacten. In ghetto,

I should learn a trade of Tinsmith and capable I was

and picked up very fast. Within a few months, I was a

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 14

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

full-fledged Tin Smith. So much so that what we were

doing there was for half-houses we used to make the

cans--the spray cans or milk cans. So it made it

turning the uh medal and also uh soldering. I could

answer first that it's not how you holding the solder

iron or you leading the solder but how you apply the

acid before and that's how the solder will be. When I

once went bought in a utensil finished. It was only

about 2 months after I started--you know not even 2

months and I showed him that I did--I finished it--the

foreman couldn't believe it. You couldn't do it. He

wouldn't trust me--said he accused me that somebody

else did it for me. Till he went in the shop with me

and I showed him how I solder that just like a string.

That convinced him yet that I did it. In a month later

he made me the foreman for the whole shop. That was

what I did in the ghetto after I was 14. My father

were doing in that time, as I said before in the bak-

ery. But then they were short in people to sent out

for certain jobs outside of the ghetto and they didn't

have enough could they send and they had to--to say

that the men would of give me 60 men or a hundred men

or 300 men and they were short, they'd grab whatever

they could. So even my father who was employed in the

ghetto had to go out--outside. Usually he did not go

outside the ghetto. The problem was that this was a

winter and they used to go out when it was dark and you

know, father was very religious and he had to put down

that film. During the day not during the night--you

can not do it put it down. So he hid to put on the

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 15

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

film in the morning before he went out put a forehead

on top of this film--a forehead and wh-whold day he use

to work like that and came back at night. That is

torture because anybody that knows that there are

certain limitations, certain restrictions what you can

do--you need it fever and you where it film. And that

is torture what few time he had to do it or other wise

he was not exposed to the outside of the ghetto.

SB: In--in the house, was it cold?

BZ: In the house, we had a oven that was heated by wood

and uh the back of feet was in the other room. It was

in between the two rooms and the same oven you use to

bake something and being like I said my father in the

uh--in the uh bakery so probably had maybe a little

better than most people. But in the

house--the--the--the--the--uh colder the house was more

or less bearable. We managed the best we could. Of

course, wh--it was not comfortable but manageable

according to the ghetto standard. In one summer I

remember, we had uh no where to put the garbage so in

the back yard--these houses were separated and each one

was a small houses and--and uh lots so the whole back-

yards the--the uhh be--toilets were in the--the

eh--eh--eh--eh separately little houses in the back-

yard. And when the--you use to did a hole for garbage

to put the garbage. When the hole were filled up,

you--you--you uh covered it with the dirt and dug a

hole next to it. And that's the way you go around to

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 16

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

it--to get rid of--of the rubbish. One summer or

spring morning, a guard and I take a look. There are

certain weeds or certain ga--grass that grows on

top of an old garbage dump. And I recognized that this

is tomato to plants. And I didn't kept it a secret but

this is definitely the tomato plants. So in the corner

of the house--what we had in the other side, I took

this plants and made a garden. That year I picked a

hundred and fifty kilo of tomatoes. Uh I was about

14--13/14. I use to sell the tomatoes. A kilo of

tomatoes for 2 kilo of bread. That helped us survive.

While other people had to do other things--

(End is cut off)

(Beep)

BS: Wentworth Films. Kovno Ghetto project. Continua-

tion with interview with Berl Zisman. Camera roll 55

is up. Sound roll 27 continued.

(Cut)

BS: Camera roll 56 is up.

(Cut)

C: 56, marker 4.

SB: Um, let's talk a little bit more about foods. So

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 17

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Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

you had the tomatoes but what other kinds of things did

you have. And what ingenuity did your mother use for

example and?BZ: What uh actually helped us a lot during

that, I said before, three of my cousins stayed with

us. One of them were was going out to work in a kitch-

en in Kovno. I don't know what kind of a place it was

or for a army place or but one of the jobs was peeling

potatoes. Of course the peeling potatoes and the peels

they bring them home. And uh imagine that being that

uh they needed the peels so that they get go home,

they peeled a little heavier. But this was a uh one of

the sustaining things--potato peels that came from

kitchens and that way use to be washed, cooked, and all

kinds of food made out of it. Even if you had to burn

a little flour and make uh Kanadlak--you know, Kanad-

lakha--uh potato rolls. And they put in hot water and

boil it and make soup out of it. That was part of

that--of our diet. And whatever else you could find or

trade or people that use to go outside of the ghetto

and deal with the gentiles and the give away a piece of

a sweater or a uh--or a uh a garment or uh jewelry or

whatever they could find for anything for a piece of

food. But all in all we co--comparatively we had it

uh--we managed in ghetto eh for the ghetto standard the

best we could.

SB: And earlier you said you had to--had to cheat

somehow to survive. Tell me about that.

BZ: Well we did a lot of things uh to cheat uh we--we

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 18

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

sto--we stole uh whatever we could, we needed wood.

You asked me about heating. Anywhere you had a piece

of wood that you could further tear off and bring it

home. That was uh--that was brought home. Anywhere

you could find a piece of uh a wire it went home. For

instance, we use to, we didn't have --we made ourselves

a uh what they call to--to make a high gl--uh hot

water. I took two spoons wired them up, hold out a

piece of cotton and uh--on--on--on a piece of wood and

when you connected it and put it in the water this is

boiling. You made uh makeshift things. I want to go

back to the Kinder Actia when I said before when they

found--the--the they found us in the bunker and they

pulled us out and they made a selection and put part on

one side and on the other side we did not know what's

going on. But my father was on one side and I was on

the other side. And then and one of the officers

twist--turned it around. He said he sent my father on

that side and me he pulled to the other side. We

didn't know what was right and what was wrong. My

brother and a girl, a daughter of the uh my neighbors

escaped my uh miraculous. It was a game by the Germans

had big dogs. And they told these two kids--go run!

And the dogs started off to chase them. Somehow, as I

said before, it was late in the afternoon. The dog

chased them. The run around the houses. A couple

times a dog grabbed my--my--brother by uh--by uh the

arm but he had a heavy coat on so you couldn't--it

couldn't bite him. And finally they hid behind a--a

door and the dogs were called off and they remained

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 19

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

there. That's how my brother survived the Kinder

Actia. That was something that you survived from day

to day. Every other day there was something else had

it not been a minute before, minute after, you wouldn't

of been here.

SB: And who--how did they let you and your father go

that day?

BZ: My father was taken away with my younger brother in

the Kinder Actia and I was pushed on the other side so

I remained with the--with my mother and my brother

in--in the ghetto. That was in uh '44. In

uh--in--in--in uh spring of '44, early spring.

SB: Did they--did you father and--how old was you

brother who went with you father then?BZ: 5 years my

junior. 5 years younger than me. I was at that time

14/15 so he was uh 9/10.

SB: And did you see them get on buses?

BZ: That all I will saw them is on a truck and uh taken

gone out of the ghetto. I haven't seen them since and

maybe they--they go to Auschwitz as far as I know.

SB: And the Great Action: how did you find out what

happened to the 10,000 people who were--

BZ: That was in a few days. That was the uh talk in

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 20

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

the ghetto. A few days later, everybody said that they

took them to the 9th Fort, which was uh down the high-

way that I just told we spoke about before. And there

was and then there--there--they uh dug their ditches

and in front of the ditches they uh machine gun--ma-

chine gunned them.

SB: And the mood of the ghetto changed after that?

BZ: That uh the Big Actia--that was uh most people said

that's and Eteman. We are doomed. Sooner or later it

was a question of time. Sooner or later it will be

our--our uh time will be up. And as I said before, the

religious people, uh even if they when they had a knife

on their throat don't give up hope. So that's what it

was.

SB: And weren't books and religious practices forbid-

den? Tell me about the rules and as if I

don't know about the ghetto. Tell me about the ghetto

rules.

BZ: There was time. I don't know exactly when--when

that was a uh command that all books to be--be brought

outside; to be brought in a pile in uh--in the field

there. So and any books we found them and like any if

there's only one punishment in ghetto--killed. If you

didn't obey the rules that's the only thing. The same

thing is with the yellow uh star. Even before the

ghetto closed, there was a uh every Jew had to where a

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 21

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

yellow star on--on--on his uh lapel or on the front. I

think later they put it up front and back.

SB: And what about religious practices? Was that

allowed in the ghetto?

BZ: There wasn't--I don't think there was even any

question. Nothing was allowed. But uh the few reli-

gious people that uh secretly kept it and when uh of

course if we heard somebody coming, we dispersed imme-

diately. And that was uh but we did practice we had

da--did the most of the time we did have a median--mean

that 10 people that used to sneak in and--and--and pray

with the quorum. Many times we didn't have 10 and I

was--wasn't 13 yet. They use to give me a book and

counted me a mean there are--are that--that--we--we I

was closed to 13 enough that they--they put me in the

quorum.

SB: What about other things in the ghetto like culture?

Or other social activities?

BZ: They did try to have some kind of social activi-

ties. I wasn't much involved. My family

wasn't involved. But as far as religious activities

like there was uh the few Rabbis or uh that--that

religious people that tried to organized a little

learning--a little teaching for the youngsters. There

was something which called Karebuthotem have Oshri

whose right here in New York. Uh he organized uh for

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 22

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

go--uh ya--youngsters to have a group to learn but of

course it was the softer than it was--it couldn't be on

a steady basis but as much as we could and whenever you

can get away, there--there was a little bit learning

but very little.

SB: Did you go to his group by any chance?

BZ: Yes I did go for uh I don't know for how long but I

did go to belong to that group who's called the Farba-

cholm.

SB: Tell me a little more about it but tell me about in

an average day.

BZ: An average day till I went to that uh work eh the

Plaineverstacten, we actually did nothing except uh be

around the house; except the--the--the--the around the

garden or planting something or a thing like that. But

later around, when you had to be in the morning to the

Verstacten and there all day, and come back in the--in

the house la--late--late in the afternoon. So that was

more or less taking up with the--the--this. Uh very

little teaching. The older ones use to have a get a

chance use to teach for a while. While my father took

a private individual and I--I--I that this--they could

go there every day and--and--and--and ish they uh

learned with me. They teach me. So that was uh but it

was so much interruptions. So--so uh scarce the time

that you could uh be

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 23

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

uh feel safe and--and--and you did not want to show

your face too much in the street in the ghetto.

SB: And y--because you were a kid?

BZ: Because a kid and because you don't want to

uh--to--to--eh uh--you didn't wanted to appear. If you

are not a kid, you did--did--what--watch what you're

doing. You were--if you you're uh an ad--adult you

have uh supposed to be occupied or do something. You

needed to eh uh just if you meet somebody going into

the ghetto, it is terrible. If you saw a German and

you--he disappeared, you--you are--you are hid.

SB: Have to put another roll on.

(Cut)

BS: Sound roll 28. Camera roll 57. Interview contin-

ued with--

(Cut)

C: Mark.

SB: 5. Um, tell me about the police in the ghetto.BZ:

There was a police force. I--I had one incident with

that police force. And that is while I was working in

the--the Klainiverstacten and they needed somebody to

go outside the ghetto to work for what ever reason I

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 24

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

don't remember but I did not show up. And they came

and arrested me and put me in jail; in ghetto. There

was a jail in the ghetto. And I was miserable. There

were characters in ghetto; in jail that I guess

haven't--like never jail. And I had to stay overnight

there. Even my father with all his protection; with

all the people that he knew couldn't get me out before

the next day. And I think our snag who's a friend of

the family and he was a member of the Jewish committee

had to intervene to let me out of that jail. That was

the next day. That was my personal encounter with the

police. All and all, I understand that they were

a--as--uh--as--uh--as--uh whole they were helping the

Jewish people rather than eh hurting them. Rather than

getting out. So they were not collaborating with the

Germans as I've heard other places but this is as a

rule eh--eh generally. Of course there were--at one

time, I understand there were--the policemen were

arrested and they were tortured to they should tell

about bunkers; about things in ghetto. To they give

out secrets for the ghetto. And uh few of them suc-

cumbed eh--eh did give out but most of them stood their

ground. This is far as my know--knowledge and

my--my--uh my personal uh--uh to do with--with the

police. I do not--didn't know anybody personally that

I knew as a policeman but as a whole, we were not

afraid of the police--of the Jewish police. While eh

for instance when I was in co--concentration camp, I

wouldn't trust the coppers. They were terrible but

in--in uh ghetto, we did not fear the police--the

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 25

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

Jewish police; at least not our family.

SB: And tell me about the Rabbi of the ghetto and he uh

you know.

BZ: The Kovno role was the uh the Avahahvum of Vumsha-

piro. That was the--that was he's name. He died in

1942. I personally as a kid, I was 9 or 10 years old,

when I had a incident and that I met him and that was

because there was a summer place, not far from Kovno,

called Callituba. And he use to stay in a villa there.

And we were also, for the summer, in that place. One

day I went in the street and I see him going out for a

walk. I went over. I was very blatant as a young kid

and I said, 'Good morning Kovno Role.' He took me for

his hand and for a hour, he walked with me; asking me

all kinds of questions and family. So I had a big

honor and unusual that I had me that know--know him in

person. He was very learn scholar for what I have in

his book from Varabum. And uh in general he was very

highly respected but uh in ghetto, I understand that

they let him uh--live--let him alone. When he died and

I went to his funeral. That was 1942.

SB: What was the funeral like?

BZ: I don't remember details . I only remember there

was people not too many but there was people neverthe-

less went and uh to the funeral. I don't know where

the burial ground was but then I remember the funeral

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 26

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

and I remember going to the funeral.

SB: In the ghetto, did you ever have fun?

BZ: Fun? As normal as kids, regardless what doing

outside, there's always--you--you leave the parent and

the parent is always a you have to have uh what it is

fun or play or--or--or--or games or interior games. Of

course the--the--the be--be--between interruptions and

between uh--uh the black clouds from the outside, we

did not constantly believe, as children, we did not

constantly have it on our minds. But uh we were re-

minded quite often that we were in ghetto. Quite often

we were reminded. Uh my cousins were taken away. I

don't remember what Actia. Either they were sent to

Riga or they were sent away uh and then they were--they

were not there anymore. After my father and my younger

brother were taken away, I remained with my uh--with my

brother the--the other brother and my mother. That

was--we were numb. We couldn't--it wasn't a

question--we weren't crying but we were--we were like

num--just pieces of would. Uh, I remember it was 10/12

days before Passover. And Passover came, we called in

a--a uh some acquiantance to make us say the--say the

prayers or to say the. I think we had a couple Matsas

there. But this was going through the--motions. Till

after that--after Passover, I remember that the news

was that the Germans are retreating. Russians are

pushing them back and it's only question when they

will--what they will--will do or when they we do liqui-

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 27

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

dating the ghetto and how they'll do it. The day came.

At that time we were already too num to look for shel-

ter, to look for bunkers, to hide. Some did hide and

survived. Some hid and did not make it because a lot

of the houses were burned to the ground. But they had

a suspicion, anybody hiding there, they burned the--the

uh houses to the ground when the ghetto was liquidated.

But I understand about 7000 people, that they were

liquidated from the ghetto and they took us into to--to

uh the--the uh freight trains and it came--we came to

Studhoff. That's where they separated the women from

the and the children from the--from the other men. My

brother wanted to go with my mother and my mother

wouldn't let him. She understood that a better chance

for--even for a young kid, to be with the men in a

working camp rather than to go with the women. And he

wanted to go with mother--mother pushed him away. I uh

you can imagine how hard for a mother to push away a

child. But she figured that this is a better chance.

From my mother, I never heard since. And I did hear

about her that she was still alive. Eh in the begin-

ning of the winter of uh 1944/45. A couple weeks after

Sutkiss, somebody still saw her in--in--in that camp

but uh near Studhoff. But after that we are never

heard of her. My brother was and I myself we were sent

ot Dakaw. In Dakaw, after the second week, the sepa-

rated the younger kids and took away about a hundred

and twenty--a hundred and thirty children and sent them

back to Auschwitz and my brother with them. I remained

in Laviawun till April of in--in uh '45. During that

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 28

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

time, I worked in Mole and that was uh building a

underground air--airport for the Germans. To describe

this airport, after I look at it and being in construc-

tion now, it was fabulous eh type of construction. The

actually created a mountain, put a ten meter cover of

solid cement with a reinforced with the--with the uh

metal uh--metal rods. And afterwards, dug out the

mountain from underneath--leaving a big large tunnel

where two large planes can stay--can pass by each other

side by side. And at the ends of the--at the side of

it, the had the shops--the workshops. That was a

fabulous idea. However, they did not finish it. My

brother was sent in Auschwitz. I was sent in stayed in

Dakaw till April. In April they took us back to when

the--when the Americans came closer, the took us to

Dakaw Proper and then from there afterwards we went on

the Death march in Turoll and I was liberated in Tu-

roll, May 5th. My brother I didn't find. Especially I

didn't find him till the--the day before Yom Kipper of

1945, which is quite a few months after liberation.

But I did hear about him in uh about 2 months or 3

months after the war ended that he was in Salbergs.

And so the whole story--the way I went to look for

him--couldn't find him because he went with the trans-

porter--that he thought was going to Lithuania and then

he found it--it--it--it was not going to Lithuania, he

skippped the transport and came back to Austria and

that's the second time. That's when I found him deep

in Austria, in a--in a DP camp.

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 29

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: We have to put another roll.

BS: Go to camera roll number 58. Slate 6 is up.

C: 58 marker 6.

SB: Now I'll take you back to the ghetto. Tell me, as

if I'm a kid--describe to me the Verstaten in the

ghetto. What--who were they for? Who did they serv-

ice? How many different ones? Were there a variety of

the things there?

BZ: The way I understand, the committee in the ghetto,

and that is Kovno ghetto, I think they--they were more

loyal to the Jewish people to the in the ghetto than

what I hear in other ghettos. They really transformed

the ghetto in a work uh Laga--in a work force. Making

the Germans, being dependent on the labor that the

ghetto was providing. And I think that is maybe be one

of the reasons that Kovno ghetto survived longer than

other ghettos. Because after a while, they became to

be dependent on the labor forces--use to go out to the

ghetto in different areas to do--to perform work. In

the ghetto there was the Kleineverstaten and the Klei-

severstaten. The Kleineverstaten was doing the small

things and also services. Like I said before, for

half-houses, for other uh areas, for farmers, to--to

supply them with the uh necessary things. But the

Kleisverstaten, even more so. They did a lot of the

things like uh fixing uh shoes or fixing things. For

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 30

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

the and--and--and clothing stuff that the Germans

really needed it. And therefore this idea was every-

body should be employed. To--they were hiding--if

somebody could not be employed, they were hiding it and

pushing it under--make sure that everybody has a name

and a number--they are employed. And this was the idea

in ghetto and that's why I think the Kovno ghetto

survived longer than the other ones. With this in

mind--that was the idea that I became a--a uh Tin Smith

and I came--I came to a concentration camp in Dakaw.

They asked, 'Do you have any professionals?' 'Yes, I

am a Tin Smith.' The end was I ended up in taking care

of one of the officers in--in the Mole. For uh--for a

long time, I took care of the uh hud. I had to make

sure that I sweep--sweep up their uh--the uh--uh for-

man's--they were Germans and there was uh big uh

the--the--the big forman--that he had his special room.

He was a big shot there. And the other ones had the

front room but I had to make sure that every morning--I

come in the morning--I heat--I make the ovens--I--I

make uh heat--and I make the water and they come in for

lunch--I have the something--the kettle on--the sound

and so forth for this helped me too because I was a kid

of uh 15/16 and uh that's uh. I use to do a good job.

I use to clean up and make sure that everything is

clean and everything is neat and everything is in order

and uh the way I uh always--order--always there was a

place. For a long time I worked like that. It was a

time when I did go out for work and we use to work 12

hour shifts and in the 12 hour shifts we only had 2

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 31

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

breaks of 15 minutes and they use to give us the what

they call--what they call soup. Actually use to be

moldy bread that's actually green and that's what they

call--they--they--they b--they boil it, make soup out

of it--the soup was green. And that was

the--the--the--you had a bowl and that's what--that's

what you ate. One break like that and we were working

in the forrest, cleaning uh trees and

knocking down trees and cleaning--and--and cleaning it

for the lumber. I laid down on a bunch of branches and

fell asleep. They probably wouldn't have missed me if

they were not called back because the--the main work

was to carry the cement from the wagons into that uh

barn there that they had a--a uh--a system. They had

a--a--a--a system where they are pouring out the cement

from the bags in--on the ground and there was a school

that was pushing the cement to the machines that were

making the b--the concrete. What when the wagons were

not there with the cement. I didn't come on time. The

took us--use--took us to farthest to do other work.

When the wagons came we were called back. Every twenty

people had a an S.S. storm trooper watching us besides

the forman German to tell us what to do and that was

for the Mole. I fell asleep and they had to go away

and the counted and somebody missing. Now the German,

the watchman, the S.S. man, would have gotten help from

somebody missing. They were looking around. It took

them about half an hour to three quarters of an hour

and finally they were shouting and I woke up. That

night, if I survived anything, that was the--the--the

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 32

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

time that the guard saved me because I--we were--we

were marching--we were 5 abreast--20 lines--a hundred

people in the marching. The wanted--had to go from one

place to the other place, they had to go stand

abreast--3, 4 or 5 abreast and that's the way we were

marching so the German could see exactly who is march-

ing--how many people we are. Because he was late and

he got hell for not watching men, he wanted to take it

out on me. He took the rifle and holding by the bar-

rel, and he wanted to hit me over the head with the

butt because if I'm dead because if I'm dead I'm ac-

countable but if I'm missing, they're gonna--he gets

hollered at. Fortunately, he didn't hit me over the

head. He hit me over the shoulder. And the barrel

broke in two. The rifle broke in two. He w--he kept

it on a sling over his shoulder--half a rifle on the

front--half on the back. But

whereever he--he--he just looked for me--wanted to kick

me and hit me. So I uh, the people who protected me,

by if you said that he went to on the right side, then

I changed places to the left side. The whole evening.

The only time I was safe was when I was carrying cement

because he wouldn't dare to--to--to ki--to break

and--and--and--and ruin a bag of cement.

That's--that's how he will not hit me. So the minute I

was in line, it use to be like this: there use to be 10

people, two people were loading on the shoulder, 6

people were running and 2 people were taking it off.

So the minute I was lined the 6 people to take the next

sho--the next uh bag--I may have been the 5th or the

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 33

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

4th. If I see him coming, I was the first--put a bag

on my shoulder, running back with the cement. And

that's how a whole night that's how it went down. That

was one experience. There other experiences where I

had a gun or a rifle right to my face and uh somehow uh

wh--I don't know the reasons but I'm still here.

SB: Did you build an alarm clock in the ghetto?

BZ: Yes.

SB: Tell me about that.

BZ: I don't know how you--that you know about the alarm

clock. We did not--we didn't use uh Saturdays--there

was electric--little electric but uh I told you before,

in the same room we ate, the same room we played, the

same room we slept. And we needed a little light and

Saturday we didn't--we don't put out the lights.

Before uh the uh Holocaust or now, we have either

regular alarm clock or regular time clock and we have

uh people that allowed to put on and put off the lights

so no problem. But there was a problem. So what we

did is I took a regular alarm clock that you wind up

and you take the--the wrap around a piece of string and

put it on the switch. You put it--the clock tight on

the wall and when the time comes this starts rolling,

it shuts of the light. This was we built ourselves.

That's what you call alarm clock. When the time comes,

it shut off.

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 34

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: Um, and tell me about the council. Tell me about

the administration in the ghetto--what you knew about

them.

BZ: The administration, while I was in ghetto, I had

little to do with it--with them because I was a young-

ster except with my father and he being a permanent eh

Kovno citizen, knew everybody and everybody knew him.

So all the politics that went on, more or less, we knew

it in our house. And all I know is what I

heard--overheard the adults talking about. And the

counsel was--it had many many predicaments like if they

made a demand--the Germans made a demand to--to--to

make an Actia, they had to make a decision. Are we

gonna cooperate with them or we'll say no--we

don't--we're not--we're not cooperating. By not coop-

erating it--it means two things. Either they can kill

them all and the Germans did on their own or they can

uh maybe sometimes uh intervine but uh they did not. I

think, that the--the counsel did not cooperate and not

collaborate with the Germans. As much as they could,

they tried to protect the Jewish people.

SB: We have to put up one more roll.(Cut)

BS: Sound roll 29. Camera roll 59.

(Cut)

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 35

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

C: 7.

SB: Can you tell me about your brother's Bar Mitsva?

BZ: Yes I'll tell you. I was Bar Mitsva in ghetto in

1942. I remember the uh necessary uh things to learn.

An uncle of mine who is still there, taught me and I uh

said my uh Dreshum and my--my speech and I uh, in

ghetto, it was on a Saturday. But more imp--more uh

vivid--more uh interesting is my brother's Bar Mitsva

which came out on a Sukis. In ghetto, my father, as

much as he could, with the minimum uh, possibility that

he had, kept up whatever he could, as far as religious

uh things to do. And we had Asuka. Asuka means when

we take a couple old doors and cover it up with some of

the clothes which is the Asuka and we had Asuka in

ghetto. My brother who was born on Yom Kipper, had a

Bar Mitsva in Sukis and at that time, we had a few

people that with dining was over, playing in our house

after that went into the Asuka and my mother whatever

she wished took it from I don't know where--had a

couple of cookies and uh what we called uh something to

save a Ahiem on and the had a celebration--the Suki

around the table. At that time, one of the secre-

taries--secretary for the committee passed by and my

father called him into the Suka and uh he backing off

not to want to come in because he was called for an

important meeting in the committee. Nevertheless, my

father took a hold of him, wouldn't let him go, pulled

him in the Suka, introduced him to the people and uh he

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 36

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

got pulled in. He was served the uh, also the refresh-

ments whatever it was and then he was told that this is

a Bar Mitsva of my brother. He was amazed and this is

one of the two rights in the book. He was amazed how

the religious people can forget about all of the trials

and tribulations, all the was doing outside in the

ghetto and eh--eh--eh and the Germans and still be

devoted and some of us to--to play and to sing. Even

so the song was something that expressed the hopeful-

ness in the worst situations, we still the hope to--to

God to ask him. So much so, that the man ends his book

that he envys those who believe. And that was my

father's character; to make somebody happy. I know of

a other story that somebody would ask what are you

doing on this street, you don't live here. People use

to go out to work for a long long day from early morn-

ing to night and that man used to pass by our house,

said you don't live here what are you doing here? Said

well I was hoping maybe I would meet Fivel Zisman and a

few words would enliven me--would--would--would--would

condole me for the next day or so. That was the char-

acter of my father and that was the way people thought

of him. To speak to him a few words was enough to

uplift somebody and unfortunately with all the hope,

some of them did not materialize. And he went perished

in the Holocaust like so many other millions. But the

Bar Mitsva of my brother was something special that

other people in ghetto could celebrate together with

him.

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 37

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

SB: Was religion a form of resistance?

BZ: It was not a question of resistance. It was a

question that we will not give up. That we'll not

surrender. We will do us, what ever happens, we will

still do us will hope and with prayer to God that some

how, hopefully, we'll survive. And those that did,

did. I did.

SB: And the year that this Bar Mitsva took place,

when--when was this relative to the Kinder Action?

BZ: That was a half a year before the Kinder Action.

This was in--in the beginning of the winter and the

Kinder Action was at the end of the winter.

SB: Did you know anything about Partisans?

BZ: We heard about it through the grape vine and a

matter of fact, I had somebody that came into ghetto

that I knew from before the ghetto and he use to come

in dissapear and reappear. And he use to go, sneak out

of the ghetto somehow and he belonged to the Partisan.

He is alive now. He is what's his name Usic--uh I

don't--I can't recall his name what yes he--he went to

the Partisan.

SB: And can you, again, describe to me the hiding

place? Did you help build the hiding place?

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 38

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

BZ: Yes sure we help dig that--that tunnel. And uh I

SB: What did you do with the dirt?

BZ: On--on all four to dig a tunnel in the ground,

support it with whatever we could, pieces of lumber,

pieces of wood to--to support. The only way to get in

is as I described before is through that uh basement of

that vestibule and there was a slab of cement that when

you took it out and then you could inside you had a way

to put it back in place--to pull it back in place.

That when you looked at it, you see--you could see

crack in the cement but you wouldn't not recognize that

this was something like a door. You had to go on all

four to creep into that and c--and uh 10/12 feet to go

to that room that was dug out there in the room was

made like uh a couple of beds like uh the one a

top--one a top of the other. And that's the way if

people see it set or--or laid down and there was also a

problem with air. So there was a pipe in the back of

that shed in the bushes there, we left a one pipe for

air to--to--to--to have some air inside there. The

tunnel was like a wide. It had a uh turn that it went

to the--to the uh well and anytime you wanted to, you

could fetch some water with a pail and a rope and from

there it went back to the--to the shirt where under-

neath the shirt, maybe two or three feet underneath

there was two feet of dirt on top of it and underneath

there, there was a bunker. So yes we built it and took

us months to build it. Of course this was not only at

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 39

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

night. One night the well dissapeared. No--nobody knows

there's any trace of it. That we covered. We took a

couple of rings, covered it up and--and--and filled

them with dirt. Make sure that the growth--the--the

some growth on top of it like nothing--nothing before.

And that was the--the--the bunker. While there, air

was eh the biggest problem. We had also--in made a

couple cans and--and--and the--the little food we did

have and we spared something and right up make what we

call uh Soccerringus. Made bright pieces of bread into

cans, in case we have to stay there for more than Day

or two, we would have something to--to nourish our-

selves. Cuz we also left in cans in that bunker. But

when they came in, we knew that we are found out, we

had no choice but to get out of there. Had we staid

there, ther would have blown up the whole thing.

SB: And what did you do with the dirt when you...?

BZ: The dirt that we put on the side and then put in on

top and spread it out and put in--in--in--in on top of

the well as well as there's a hole. The dirt was--it

was problem when it was spread out over the gardens,

especially if they did it in--in--in the uh the time

that the--the--the--it was not uh the winter that

people in there was big lots around the houses. It

wasn't just the houses. It was a house and a lot. So

there was places to put the dirt and spread it out.

SB: Okay, thank you. Have I not asked you anything you

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KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/BEREL ZISMAN page 40

Interviewed (5-7-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854 TIMECODE NOTES:

think is important?

BZ: No, I don't know what else you want to know. I

mean a lot of interesting stories that I have in for

instance, in ghetto, since I was Bar Mitsva I use put

on it film everyday. In concentration camp, we only

had one pair of film and that was my last day. Many

times it use to be, he use to be--he use to work

day--day--day shifts--night shift and the way you use

to meet and pass by and--and--and they passed by, we

passed over each other--that's why--all this was taking

chances with your life because had you been caught you

probably they put you up and shoot--shoot you. The

damage was the biggest uh thing to make you an example.

The--the--the if they--they uh hold somebody in the

ghetto, the pulled everybody out and they in--in--on

the lot in a--in a open field, an everybody had to run

out for that--go out from the houses and watch uh

somebody being hung. In concentration camp, somebody

took a blanket--or what I say?--5 people took a blan-

ket, tore it up and made Smata--you know what Smatas

are eh?--to cover the feet--there were no socks--just

to cover the feet in the winter. So they put a blank--a

tall blanket--for that 5 people were hung. In--

(Audio Cassette Ends Here; End Missed)

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