

KOVNO GHETTO EXHIBIT Interview w/ETA HECHT page
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Interviewed (5-5-97) by Sandra W. Bradley

Wentworth Films, Inc. 9400 Kendale Rd, Potomac, MD 20854

TIMECODE NOTES:

(beep)

(Interview with Eta Hecht, Wentworth Films, Kovno
Ghetto project, 5-5-97, sound roll 11 continued, camera
roll 22 at the head. Eta Hecht spelled E-T-A H-E-C-H-
T)

(Speed, roll 22, marker 1)

SB: Begin with you telling me when and where you were
born.

EH: I was born in Kovno, October 7, 1938, Kovno Lith-
uania.

SB: Tell me your earliest recollections about Kovno
itself. What are some of the snippets that you remember
from your...

EH: Actually I rally don't remember anything before we
were sent to the ghetto. I was two and a half years old
when we entered the ghetto so basically what I remember

is just being in the ghetto in the room mostly.

SB: Do you remember actually going to the ghetto.

EH: No, I don't.

SB: So tell me what you remember from being in the

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room in the ghetto.

EH: Well I remember just one room, where my parents, my mother, father and my grandmother lived in this one room. I remember a little table, in the middle with a clothing hanging over it and I would sit under it most of the time because I was afraid I knew that Germans were always searching for children. So I would basically just sit under there and sometimes draw pictures. But that was it, that was my place of hiding unless someone, they were literally coming in to look for

children and there were other hiding places that I would have to go to. But that's really all I remember is just the room. Because I wasn't really allowed, at the beginning my father said they would let me out, outside, and I would have to stand right near the door, but after that I had to remain in the room because they were always searching for children to kill children. So that's pretty much. I had, I know I had a crib which eventually they got rid of because again that would have been a sign that a child was living in that house. That's pretty much it. I.

SB: Do you remember being taught to be quiet and to stay under the table. Can you tell me about that.

EH: I wasn't taught to be, to stay under the table. I would just do it myself. I just felt comfortable, a little more secure there. There were times when I had to hide places and my parents would of course tell me

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to be very quiet and not to move. But as far as the table itself, I think it was just my own little refuge, or sometimes even under the bed.

SB: And you already had a fear of Germans and tell me a little more about that.

EH: Yes, I do. I remember that. It's interesting because I remember, as I said I would sit under the table and I really didn't have any toys but paper and pencil and I would draw pictures. And it was always about soldiers, Germans and the Jews fighting. I remember drawing pictures of house, of a house, this one is just amazing because it has always stayed with me. I drew a picture of a house with a chimney and that I would stuff Hitler inside that chimney and that he would suffocate and die and you're, it's only recently that I even thought about my god how symbolic that the chimney was obviously I had, was no idea. I just knew a house had a chimney but it's just amazing that I did know. I understood you know the risk that was involved for me if I was not quiet or if I you know would not, if I would move if papa wasn't, if I was told not to and so on. I, I definitely knew the danger. I was aware of that.

(Mark 2)

SB: So do you remember knowing who Adolf Hitler was.

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EH: Yes, I knew about Hitler, I knew the name Hitler and that he was a bad guy. I definitely knew that because again with that picture with the chimney, I wanted him. I knew he must, I guess the leader as opposed to the important one that I felt that he deserved to die.

SB: Do you remember anything about being cold or being hungry or anything like that.

EH: Yes definitely, definitely I remember that. There was one time specifically actually it was towards the end, in March of 44, the Germans had a major search for children. They called it kinderaktion and my parents tried to you know they had to hide me. And we went

underneath the stairway. Where we lived there was a second floor.

SB: I'm sorry.

(Marker 3)

SB: Ok, you were talking about the kinderaction.

EH: Yes, so we hid underneath the stairway. My parents had a cousin of mine place a mattress to camouflage the opening and we stayed there for 2 days and 2 nights and it was in March and it was very, very cold. The house was just made out of wooden, of wood. And you could see through the cracks you know the outdoors and

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I remember being very, very cold, hungry. I had a cold, I was coughing and I remember having to try to suffocate the cold, I would try I knew that if I would cough

out they would hear me. Because I can still remember the sound of the sol, the Nazi soldiers walking up the stairs, you know the boots and, and hearing people screaming outside. So it definitely was the fear and the hunger and the cold and that I definitely remember. There was, it's something that has never left me. Besides being hungry of course in between. You know the whole time in the ghetto there was very little food.

SB: Going back to near the beginning of the ghetto, so this is when you were littler. The great action, do you remember anything about that.

EH: Actually I don't. My father has described it to me. Interestingly I, I might add that he mentioned that as the day when everybody had to line up in front of the Nazi and he pointed people to go to the left and to the right and my father noticed that the people that were being sent to the left were the disabled, the old and the children. So when it was our turn and apparently he pointed to the left, my father just grabbed me as we were all walking together and just pushed our way into the right side and that's why I survived. Or I survived certainly as a child, the action, but I don't remember that cause I had just turned three.

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TIMECODE NOTES:

(Battery)

(Speeding, and marker 4)

SB: Tell me about the great action from what you've learned from your father.

EH: That particular day when...Well as he told me he said it was early in the morning, October 28, 1941. I had turned 3 October 7 as a matter of fact. And he said that loudspeakers, trucks with loudspeakers drove through the ghetto and told everyone to leave their home. That every person had to leave and assemble on a place. And then that we had to line up in rows of 8 I believe and march in front of this Nazi who sat on his chair. And pointed to people to go to the left or to the right. And he said that as I pointed out and my father of course became aware that the people to the left, something, he just had the feeling something was wrong, why there were all these elderly and the small

children and sick people were being sent to the left. He just yanked us to the right. And the next day we found out that the people who were sent to the left were killed and there ere about 10,000 people who were killed that day. So this is.

SB: Tell me instances of you being hidden just when the Germans did come in to your...

EH: There was one instance now this was before the kinderaction, when a neighbor came yelling, quick hide

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her, hide her, hide her. People would watch out for one another. And a Nazi was coming into the house. So my parents, they had already removed the crib. That I had been in. And they just had one bed. So they, they rolled me up in the bedding like a sausage. I was inside of that and they rolled me against, placed me I should say against the wall so it looked like the back

of a sofa, I don't know if you can visualize that. But they placed me in there and they told me to be very quiet and not to move and I remember feeling that, that I was suffocating and I couldn't breathe and yet I knew I wasn't supposed to move because otherwise you know they would find me and that meant death so that was a very significant event that I remember. The other one of course was underneath the steps. Another episode is eventually when I was smuggled out of the ghetto but everything in between is pretty much. It's sort of like snapshots, you know. A couple that really stand out and everything else I just don't recall that well.

SB: Tell me again about under the stairs during the kinderaction.

EH: Well we went into hiding under the stairs that were, it was an opening. It was at the house had two stories and we were right underneath the stairs, a mattress was placed against it to camouflage us. My parents and I were there. My grandmother had already passed away and we stayed there for 2 days and 2 nights and it was very cold, it was in March, the end of

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March. I had a very bad cough. I remember how I was trying not to cough so that I wouldn't be heard.

Because you could hear everything that was going on.

And we obviously realized that they could hear us. I remember hearing this, the noise, the sound of the boots of the marching soldiers running up and down the steps over our heads, being very hungry and cold and afraid. That was my memories.

SB: Your parents in there with you.

EH: Excuse me.

SB: Were your parents in there with you.

EH: Yes, they were with me, they were with me.

SB: Do you remember anything else after, right after that when you came out after the kinderaction.

EH: No, I really don't. Not, after that particular day, I remember that within three weeks from that event I was smuggled out of the ghetto. My parents decided to smuggle me out and to they, they knew that I would be

staying with a Christian family. And interestingly, even though I was born in Lithuania, I did not speak Lithuanian, we spoke Yiddish at home. I was two and a half when I entered the ghetto so obviously my vocabulary wasn't very extensive but and in the house we spoke Yiddish. So now they had to basically brainwash

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me that I was Christian, that I was you know
Lithuanian and we had 3 weeks to teach me Lithuanian
and to again to teach me that I was Christian and they
gave me a new name and that I was never to admit that I
was Jewish. So that was the other major event you know
obviously I remember.

(Camera roll 23 is up)

(Marker 5)

SB: As if you haven't already told me anything about

the escape three weeks after, why don't you just tell me that whole thing again.

EH: Ok, right after the children's action, my parents realized that in order for me to survive they would have to get me out of the ghetto. That luck would run out sooner or later and so they were able to get in touch with someone, a Christian who was actually a colleague of my father and my father was a teacher before the war and so was this gentleman. But he was a Christian from, he was a teacher of a Lithuanian school. My father was teacher at a Jewish school but they used to meet. And he was able to get a note to him to ask him if he would take me. If he would save my life. And he responded that he would. He liked my father and he would do it for him. So now my parents had to make arrangements. You just don't walk out of the ghetto, how to get me out. So they decided to use a

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potato sack. And to put me in that bag and then when my mother would go to work with the women you know they had to file out of the ghetto to go to work, she would carry me out that way. They planned on a special day when they knew that the changing, there were different guards and this particular one was bribed. He was a little better than the others and arrangements had been made so, so I had about 3 weeks to learn Lithuanian, because I only spoke Yiddish at home. And my parents had to basically brainwash me to teach me that I was to be Christian and that I would never admit that I was Jewish. And they gave me a new name. I, my Yiddish name was Eta or Etalle, and they called me Ellenitia, and that, and as I said I had to learn Lithuanian. And so when the day arrived I was. Well and also I had practiced, they would practice with me to sit in that bag without moving, while my mother would carry me around in the room. So then when the day arrived and I had to be carried out. Sorry. I just remembered. My mother taking the risk obviously and she carried me out and we met the Lithuanian and she got out, removed her yellow star. Because you, yo know so she would look Lithuanian. And she appeared that way. And would take, took off my star. We all wore stars in the ghetto. And then she handed me over to this woman. And I remember saying good by. Sorry. And being a mother myself, I just wonder how she, how hard it was for her, realizing she'd never see me again. Sorry. And then I

was taken away. My mother went back, put back her star and went back into the line with the women and went to

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work. And that was in April when I was when she smuggled me out and then in July the ghetto was liquidated and sent off to camps, to the concentration camps.

SB: What about the family that you lived with. What happened to you after that.

EH: Well basically they, I was with them. They had 8 children, some were already grown. This teacher was quite a bit older than my father. He had a, his family was, there were some young ones, there was a couple of teenagers in the house. And I remember the, I remember one episode when this boy would tease me that I'm Jewish. And I remember saying no I'm not. You know. But I was, I think I was treated pretty well. I don't have any recollections really. I just remember that, I

know well there was one time when uh there were sirens were going and they went into hiding and they were afraid to take me with them into the hiding place. Because the neighbors would know that, I was kept inside you know. So I would say they left me in the house all by myself while they all went to hide. And then another time, actually I was in that house for three months and then they'd have to move me to the country. This gentleman his name was Mr. Losouskas, Jonas Losouskas, had a sister in the country and they, they placed me there because he afraid, he was afraid that it was too dangerous to keep me int he house, that neighbors might talk, and children, other children, you know friends of the children and I was with. So then I

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spent 3 months on a, on a farm. But I just remember be, sleeping in a bed with 2 other kids but nothing major really or eventful that occurred at that point. I,

until finally when my father came to get me. And when he arrived, I, I can still remember I was sitting at a table drawing pictures with the other children. This was on the farm. And he came up and, and he said do you know who I am and I looked at him and then I looked down. I was afraid to admit cause I had been taught not to admit anything yo know that I was Jewish and so on. So I was just afraid. So then later he took me aside and took me outside and we went for a walk. And he says do you remember grandmother so and so. And of course I said yes and you know then I, so I did recognize him but I was just still afraid you know to say anything. I was five and a half so I was well taught.

(Cut)(Marker 6)

SB: So after you were smuggled out of the ghetto what happened to your parents.

EH: Well my parents were still in the ghetto and then from what I understand July, the middle of July in 1944, the ghetto was liquidated and they transported everyone to concentration camps and they placed them on cattle trains. And my parents, apparently during that time, when they were traveling they talked about maybe one of them should jump off of the train and just take a chance that maybe one parent would survive so that I

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would have a parent. And my mother was afraid to jump. So my father said ok, he'll do it. And so he jumped off the train from that little opening, there was just the little window while the train was moving and it was still on Lithuanian territory. he jumped and of course fell, got hurt. He must have lost consciousness he said because when he woke up there was somebody standing there, a railroad worker who was going to take him to the gestapo. He said he didn't believe you know he says where are your papers. My father didn't have anything and so on, so my father managed to run away from him and my father survived basically by hiding in the woods and on farms and that's how he survived the war. My mother on the other hand went on to the concentration camp which was too tough and that's where she was the remaining of the war, remainder of the war.

(Let's cut and keep rolling)

(This is voice over, Eta Hecht explaining pictures)

SB: Tell me about the photographs.

EH: (VO) A few days ago I was looking for pictures from the before the war and I came across a picture that was in an album. The picture shows me and my parents. this picture was taken in 1939 in Switzerland where we had gone to visit my uncle, before we, of course we had to go back to Lithuania, unfortunately. We weren't allowed to stay in Switzerland. But I had

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never really looked on the back of the picture because it was in an album. I took it out of the album and on the back of it I noticed there was something written in Yiddish so and it was dated July 4, excuse me July 7th 1944. And I became aware that in July of the 14th in 1944 the ghetto was liquidated and here is this picture and what it says on it is that this should, this pic-

ture should be sent to B. Levin, to Arosa Switzerland. He says, it says here, it's all in Yiddish and it says (Yiddish) . He should look for his brother's child, Etalle, which is that's my name, Levin (Yiddish). Her name is now Ellenitia. And then it says her new family I do now know. Well apparently while my father did know of course where I was, I was with this Christian family who was a colleague of his from before the war but he was obviously afraid to write it down because he thought if, in case someone would find, a German would find this picture they would know where I was hidden. But when I found it I just became so emotional, I just couldn't believe here is this picture and here is and it was written right before, right after of course I was gone already and right before the ghetto was liquidated. I'm assuming that this picture was hidden in the ghetto because I don't know how else where else it would have been. But unfortunately I don't know exactly where it was hidden or the exact details of it. But I must say that this was quite a revelation to me and really excited about I was very excited about finding it.

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SB: Do you think your father left it because he
thought maybe he wouldn't make it.

EH: Oh I, I'm sure. I'm sure of that. Yeah I think
my parents, I think it was quite a hopeless sit, they
all thought it was a hopeless situation and I don't
think they felt they would survive. But and that's why
he wrote it the way he did,
whoever would find it.

SB: Thanks.

EH: A few days ago I was going through an album of
pictures and I found a picture of my parents and I that
was taken before the war in Switzerland. My parents and
I had gone there in 1939 to visit my uncle who lived
there. And when I took the picture out of the album and
I turned it around I realized there was something
written on it in Yiddish. Also that the date on it that
was written on the back of the picture was July 7, 1944
which is barely a week before the liquidation of the
ghetto and what it says on the picture basically is
that this, send this, send this, meaning this picture

to B. Levin, Arosa Switzerland. And it says here in, it's all in Yiddish (yiddish). He should look for his brother's child Etalle Levin, that was my name, that is my name, my maiden name was Levin. (Yiddish). Her name is now Ellenitia. (Yiddish) Her new family I do not know. However, he, eh did know because this was written in July and in April they sent me away to this

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Christian family was a colleague of his so he knew I was with Mr. Losouskas and where I was, he knew exactly the address and everything but apparently he must have been afraid that in case this was found by a German they would be able to, to find me, they would be able to locate me. But I was just so moved when I found this because I realized how desperate. They obviously didn't feel, my father didn't feel that he would survive and so whoever would find this, you know should give this to my uncle so that he would find me.

SB: Thank you.

EH: A few days ago I was looking through some pictures or some albums of pictures and I found a picture of my parents and I that was taken in Switzerland in 1939. We were there on a visit, visiting my uncle, my father's brother. And then of course unfortunately we had to go back to Lithuania. We were not allowed to stay there. But this picture when I turned it around, I realized there was something written in Yiddish on it. And it was also dated July 7, 1944. Which was the week before ghetto was liquidated. And on the, in the, on this picture, on the back of this picture it says that this should be sent to B. Levin, Arosa Switzerland and in Yiddish again it says (Yiddish). He should look for his brother's child, Etalle which was my name Levin. (Yiddish). Her name is now Ellenitia. (Yiddish) which means her new family I do not know. Well my father did know where I was and he knew the name of the family

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because this was a colleague of my father's and he knew exactly where I was but I, I think what happened his, he felt in case this picture would be found by Germans, that of course they would be able to locate me and also I realized, I got very emotional when I found this picture because I realize how hopeless the situation must have been that my parents felt that they wouldn't survive and so whoever would find this should send it to my uncle so that he could you know find me and take care of me.

(end interview)

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