

## **Arye Segal – Additions to Testimony No. 03/6216**

### Prior to 1939:

Skidel was a pretty town. People came to the town to be ordained as rabbis. There were many *yeshivot*. The entire town was Jewish and the Gentiles lived on the outskirts. Money for Israel was collected here, from Skidel people left for *kibbutz* training farms and then made *aliya* [“went up” – immigrated – JA] to Israel. I belonged to “Hashomer Hatzair” [leftist, kibbutz-oriented, Zionist youth movement – JA].

On Fridays we would go to the river where there were trees that grew in the shape of benches, on which we would sit. On the Sabbath we would walk on the bridge. We didn’t travel on the Sabbath. Chestnut trees grew on both banks of the river. I had a teacher named Danietzky, who had an only daughter. I remember him when I was a child. He committed suicide by drowning in the river. I went with Father to rescue him. The roots of the tree were deep in the water and his body was beneath the roots and it was cold, Father tied me, I jumped into the water and found it hard to release him until I managed to tie a rope to his leg and we pulled him out and transferred him by buggy. It was a tragedy.

Relations with the Byelorussians were good. During the German occupation they helped me. The Poles were anti-Semites, when we went to the movies they threw stones at us and there were pogroms. I went to the *Torah Ve’da’at* [Torah and Knowledge – JA] school, where I studied mathematics, German, Polish, but my father couldn’t pay. So I didn’t study long in the school and entered a *yeshiva*.

### 1939-1941

Under the Russians I had it good. I worked in our smithy with Father. They took all the blacksmiths and organized a cooperative, and that was bad. Before you could withdraw money, put back money, but with the Russians there was only enough to eat. They shut our smithy and transferred us to a wealthier smithy and so we were working for the government. They sold the products. We got a monthly wage. I don’t recall how much.

We continued to pray in the synagogue. The Germans burned it down with the people inside. We had a large house and we rented it out to a Russian couple. He was a pilot and brought his wife.

### 1941-1945

I went to school for four years and the Germans entered in 1941. They began making problems. They did not make a ghetto. Only the outskirts of the town remained and the middle was burned. Only Jews remained, the Gentiles lived in villages. What to do with them? There were elderly people who remained in the houses and couldn’t get out. They burned them in their beds. Poured gasoline and burned them. Afterward they took everyone to the ghetto. What remained in the middle was Skidel’s airfield, not far from a large river that surrounded the airfield. There was only one bridge on

which it was possible to cross to the airfield. At the airfield were two story wooden buildings, many buildings, into which they put the people. The remainder – the artisans, such as shoemakers and carpenters and tailors were left in the town. The Germans asked the artisans to work for them. Shoemakers to make shoes and boots and also the carpenters worked for them. For this we received bread rations, half a loaf and all sorts of little things from which one couldn't live.

Then they saw that the Jews had it too good. First they received an order from Germany to send those under the age of 30-35 to work. Then they would take each week 30-40 people and send them to the forests. Afterwards the Gentiles told me that they dug pits and killed them. Each pit held 20-30 persons. The Gentiles that said this would come to do tinsmith work for my Father and I also worked for Father and I heard. I told Father that I am going to join the partisans. Mother said – go! But how to go? I must know who to go to. We have snow for as long as 9 months and rain, not like here in Israel. One needs to be dressed and our forest ran for a distance of some 150 kilometers with high trees, and in these forests in the summer there is food, berries, like black grapes and all sorts of things that can be eaten. There are villages where one can enter and exchange goods for food.

Many Russians who were taken prisoner began to run away into the forests, they began to build bunkers in the forests and the Germans were afraid to enter. They came to Father and asked him to weld for them sheet metal 10mm thick for the windows, so that they would be protected from shooting. We had a lot of work and they brought lots of sheet metal, Father and I welded the sheet metal from the outside. And I saw that it was getting worse from day to day. We remained in the same house.

Then another order was issued.

Tuesday was a market day. Jews were not allowed to enter the marketplace. Only those who had permits were allowed in. Those caught without permits were registered for work, they didn't return and only a few knew of their extermination. Father knew, he was on the outside and heard these things. And Mother was saying that she doesn't believe this and that they will yet return, women and children are waiting. It was horrible. And by then there was no food. Now the Germans saw that this is no good. There are partisans. All Jews have to be placed in the ghetto. Where? They brought everyone to the ghetto, we were left thousands of people and they said to dig pits in the earth, this was called "*zemlyanki*" [dugouts – JA] in Russian. Father and I and a few families began digging pits in the earth. Then they took us to the forest to cut wood and bring it on a 2 meter high sled; the Germans gave us boards to reinforce the walls and so that the soil wouldn't fall in and they closed it like a doghouse and there we lived two-three families. And there was no food. I told Father that I must go to the partisans. He told me, you're not going, whatever happens to you will happen to me. But we had to eat and the river was 1 kilometer wide. So I went out at night and Mother began crying and the entire family were sitting and didn't know what to do, they prayed to God, what does He want from us. They take 30-40 people who don't come back. And I got up in the morning, got dressed,

jumped into the water (about half a kilometer from the *zemlyanka*), I crossed it and reached the Gentiles. When we left the town, Father left with them new wagons, shoes for the horses, valuable merchandise in exchange for which they would give us food. And the Gentiles were good. But they were also afraid. I went to the Gentile, he gave me a sack of potatoes, flour, everything. How can I take all this? So he suggested that I take his horse, load it up with the food and ford the river with the horse. I would go like this once a week and this fed many families. We couldn't eat everything ourselves. I told the Gentile that if he helps us we will give him the house as well. The Gentile was Byelorussian and I went to school with his son for a year.

There were good houses in the ghetto but they were already taken, and those left had to make "*zemlyanki*". There were about 100 "*zemlyanki*". Each one made this grave for himself. Around us was the river. On the bridge stood German and Polish policemen and it was impossible to cross. In the ghetto there were Jewish police. They drafted workers for the Germans and picked out pretty girls for housework for the Germans. The Jewish policemen were traders, wagon owners who were looking for easy work and thought that they would live while others would not. The police and the Judenrat worked together (the chief policeman lives in Israel but doesn't want to identify himself).

All the time they demanded gold and watches and sent to work – to dig potatoes from the ground, to distribute to Jews. They took grain from the Gentiles and rationed out 16kg of wheat for two weeks, from which 5 large loaves of bread would be baked.

Father worked for the Germans and received for this, like everyone, a portion of bread (half a loaf) a little potatoes and flour, which was taken from the Gentiles. He did the work in the smithy and then went to weld the sheet metal and to shoe the horses.

They sensed that the partisans began to enter our ghetto and they wanted young fellows from us, there were those who went in the night. And there were those who were caught. One day, at 9:00 in the morning, the entire ghetto had to come in rows of ten from the airfield to the town. At the center of town was a large statue of Lenin and a Russian church. They placed benches there and brought the Gentiles as well. There were two thousand Gentiles there. They brought tables and 12 partisans (among them Jews) whom they caught, and hanged them. The Germans said that hanging was the punishment for going to the partisans and the same end awaits everyone. Afterwards arrived three four cars of German Nazis, with hammers in their hands and they gave the men hammers to break up the statue of Lenin, to take the stones in the folds of the coat and to throw them in the river. By chance, I wasn't among those and I looked on from the side. When they reached the wooden bridge, 30% of them were thrown into the water they were pulled by the current. You see something like that – the fear of God! I came home and my parents were happy that we got out of it alive.

They began to liquidate the town. They put everybody into the *zemlyanki*. No one was left in the town. They took more people for various work in the town such as roads and cleaning. The Judenrat

members and the policemen brought the people to work. The Germans didn't enter the ghetto. The Germans – also the Wehrmacht and the Gestapo.

One morning – a roll call in the ghetto square. Ten young Jews came with cameras to prepare ID cards. I heard that they are taking for work in the forests and all those taken for work will be shot there. The ID cards with a picture, original. Everyone was happy that he had a passport and was going to work.

The partisans began to go wild among us. In one day they killed 40 Germans. They entered from the forests, locked them in several houses and exterminated them. The Germans were searching for more people to hang, but they ran away. I remember that they made a camp for the Russian Army and a separate camp for the women, who didn't manage to run away. Within Skidel. They also took them to the camps.

They again began sending to work. I was working constructing a road. Stones had to be broken into four pieces to build the road, within the town, so that the Germans could travel. Afterward they took me (when I was a child I learned to repair bicycles in a shop owned by our friends) and all the Germans were traveling by bicycle, I remember that when the Germans came to us there were convoys of bicycles, motorcycles and bicycles. So there were many broken bicycles there and I repaired the bicycles for them. In the meantime I would steal parts from them and sell them to the Gentiles in exchange for food. Spokes, wheels and other parts. But if they would catch me I would have been killed. Once there was no food in the ghetto and Mother was afraid. The river was about to freeze over and I had to prepare food for two months, I would make 3-4 trips and the Gentile said to me, if you tell them that the horse is mine, they will kill my entire family, so I swore to him on the Psalms that I would never tell. There was an old Jew who always went to the village to bring food. He once had a poultry shop; there was burst of shots and I had to go in through the bridge and the Tatar policeman killed this old man. I ran back to the Gentile, it was 2km or running away, I came to him and told him that they killed the old man, everyone knew everyone. The Gentile didn't want to give me the horse because it was dangerous and suggested I sleep there for a week. We had no telephones and Mother already believed that I had been killed. Then the Gentile went by himself and told anyone who entered the ghetto to notify my Mother.

The name of the village – Gilinan and name of the Gentile – Mishok Lonka. He was my Father's age. He helped me a great deal. What did I do with the horse? I gave it back and returned on foot.

Once there was nothing to eat so I went to the riverbank so that I could cross on foot and I took a small sled and came to the Gentile. He brought me with the horse, with his large sled and my small sled and wished me well. I brought the food home. Mother saw me and told me not to go anymore because if they catch me they'll kill the entire family, because they killed many families.

The dead in the ghetto – were removed by the Gentiles by horse and wagon; there was a cemetery on the outskirts of Skidel.

There was no doctor in the ghetto. There was no pharmacy. We in Skidel didn't know what a doctor is. There was a doctor for the horses, and he was for us as well. We had a dentist, as a child, when Mother took me to him, I bit his hand from pain, here they give you a shot and you don't feel the pain. There everything was primitive, but a healthy life.

Once I caught a very bad cold and then came down with dysentery and I was bleeding. Father found the Gentile in the marketplace and he came to take me to another village to a doctor who gave me a diet with clear soup so that I would recover. Luckily, I did not have dysentery. In Birkenau in Theresienstadt I had typhus (see page 10).

Inside the *zemlyanka*, we had a wooden table, boards on top, below there was the floor for sleeping. Outside we had a *primus* (small gasoline/alcohol stove – JA), as it was impossible to keep it indoors and everyone had a *primus* and there was smoke near the *zemlyanki* and it didn't bother anyone. Water from the river. Latrines – pits on top of which were placed boards and when they were full we would move to the next pit. This too, was the work of the Committee.

Other work –

I was considered nimble, anyone who brought food was considered nimble. There was a pregnant woman that needed milk. I told Mother that I'll go out at midnight. I went to our Gentile and he arranged for me to bring the milk. She sewed bags of strong fabric and I hung them in front around my neck. The pockets held sausages and *samogon* [moonshine vodka – JA] which he made from potatoes, which I sold in the ghetto and received for it canned meat and money. I brought the woman milk at no charge, she was from our family and was the only one that drank the milk. I did such things twice a week. I would go mostly when it was snowing or raining. Then no one went outside and the Germans were not strict about guarding, which was very good for me. Once I went out with the horse and my hat got lost. I had gloves; I had sheepskin boots, Mother sawed me pants quilted with cotton wool.

People died in the ghetto from starvation, from disease – there was typhus, there was dysentery. Many women committed suicide because their husbands were taken away and didn't return. Some cut their wrists. The Jewish police removed them.

There were informers. The partisans who were hanged – were caught in the homes because of informers. My father had a friend, also a blacksmith. He had an only son. They took his son. The German said that if the father will bring a horse, the son will be returned. His house was burned down, but he hid gold and valuables in the basement of the house and he went to remove all that. He asked me if I could find him a horse, to save the son. His name was *Berl der Shmid* [Berl the blacksmith – JA] and his son's name was Shmulik. I went to the Gentile and asked him how much he

wants for the horse. Berl gave me money and gold and the Gentile brought the horse to the marketplace as I asked, because the German who demanded the horse was there, he was in charge of the marketplace. They took Berl to the marketplace and killed him. The Gentile brought the horse and they took the horse as well. This was a tragedy in the ghetto. When a baby was born, what to do with it? And babies were born and were given to the church. I remember a couple who had a textile shop. A young couple to whom a child was born and they gave him away. Families told their children to run away to wherever they want, only so that they would survive. The wagoners escaped to the forests. There it was also hard, because there was no food and they went to villages and the Gentiles began to inform on them. The important partisans were soldiers of the Red Army who escaped to the forests.

#### November 1942

The mayor of Skidel came, a Pole. With his son, he arranged some 100 two-horse wagons, wagons with straw, boards were placed and the families put in, each was allowed to take 15kg. We all traveled in the wagons to Kielbasin. There was a barrier where two Germans and Poles stood, Grodno policemen; this was 5km from Grodno. The village Gentiles looked at us and clapped their hands, because they were left with all the property. The Polish policemen accompanied us. The Jewish policemen also came to Kielbasin. There were already *zemlyanki* there and it was written there in Russian, "Anyone who enters, will not leave". I asked an elderly man, who spoke with the policemen in Polish, how long is it possible to live here, how many have been exterminated here? He answered me, 15,000 Russian prisoners. So I asked why didn't we remain in the ghetto and I wanted to run away at once. The *zemlyanki* there were large and long, like long graves. There were two openings – at the entrance and at the exit and the latrines were outside.

We had a school principal in our town who married a beautiful girl. His name was Zierbanski. A baby was born to them. Suddenly everyone was running, we sat on the *zemlyanki* and waited, we didn't work. I saw that this couple cut their wrists and Mother was holding the child and crying. This was the first suicide in Kielbasin. Trains began to arrive. They arrived at night. Cattle trains. The doors were opened and people were put in and I took Father, who could no longer walk, and Mother and my sister and Mother's sister and my little sister and my brother and Mother is saying all the time, come with me, you won't go. And I immediately thought of how to run away. Because there were fellows who ran away at once. I wanted to run to the Grodno ghetto but Mother said that only I can help them.

One transport left and I saw that we are being pulled for maybe 3-4 days, without water. There is a window covered with barbed wire and they put in a hose and the water spills over all the people one on top of the other, and there is no latrine. There were 3-4 dead people in each car, and a stench.

I heard someone asking in the train where are we going, and the Polish guard said that we are going to be burned. This was the first time that I heard this. We were brought to Birkenau: selection;

everyone was told to go in to shower. They pushed. Everyone got undressed and went into the showers. We heard screams. I was outside, we were taken to work. The next day I asked some Jew if he saw my Father, so he replied that if I talk too much I'll go out through the chimney. I was separated from the entire family. In Block 11 I met many young people from Skidel. They shaved the head and left a strip of hair "a road for the lice". We were taken to be washed, I no longer saw my friends from my town. They came from Holland, Belgium, France. They shaved us completely, washed us with cold water and hot water. We ran to the wooden shed through the snow. There we were dressed in striped clothing and placed in Block 4; the construction "commando" – to take down bricks for building a camp for women near Birkenau. The *kapo* was Polish. I was given a board on which were bricks from the railroad cars. There was a Pole, a *mischling*, from Upper Silesia. He would kill someone every day using various excuses. We had long coats and we had to fill their folds with bricks and jump with bent knees. If you fall – they kill you. I saw that I wasn't going to get out of there alive. My entire body was marked. They broke my nose. They knocked out my teeth; they had leather patches on their elbows and they beat with their elbows, my eyes were swollen, all my bones were wounded. I said to myself that they are going to finish me off anyway so I must finish him off. We unloaded another car of red bricks, I had sores on my hands. The *kapo* had a whip tipped with lead and when that hits your head, it finishes you. There was a brick and I threw it at that Pole, on his head, and he couldn't turn around. He fainted and I was afraid that they will see that I killed him, but I didn't look, I came down from the railroad car and hit him with another brick and finished him off. He was a Pole, a *heftling*(??) like myself. We returned to Block 4 in Auschwitz, there was a roll call and I trembled, fearing that I would be killed. There are informers. I was afraid of his friends; not the Germans, those can kill, but the body remains. I was a *Mussulman* [concentration camp slang for prisoners who were bald and emaciated, as well as listless and apathetic and near death, and seemed to some to resemble an ascetic Moslem - JA], they took me to Block 7 in Birkenau. To the warehouse of corpses. There I got to know a fellow who got me out of there, rubbed my face with snow and brought me to another block, we were taken to work on roads, in the snow. At noon we were given a black soup, but it warmed the body. The fellow giving out the soup saw that I was a Jew, so he spilled out part of the soup. There was a Russian with me and I said that this guy needs to be "covered", I asked what bed he slept in. I saw that he slept in Block 4 on Level 3; I took my bread portion and others and gave them to a Russian (from Mongolia) and we promised that if he kills this guy, he'll get more. He sucked the blood from his neck. I helped many people, not only with bread. When I worked with the horses, I stole sugar beets and gave them to the guys.

All the time I was thinking, why didn't I get Father or my sister out to the partisans. As I lay there in Birkenau I thought a great deal, and finally I ran away.

#### After the War

In Theresienstadt I fell ill with typhus. We bought a young pig, and were cooking it, when I suddenly felt a high fever. Ya'akov Kozaltchik was with me, he used to hang people in Auschwitz. He was a

blacksmith and knew my Father and took me to his house. He brought a Russian jeep and took me to a Russian hospital, where I lay for 40 days and emerged hairless. I was taken to an orphanage hospital. In Auschwitz he would give me food. In the evacuation, he was taken to Matthausen, while I escaped from the train. I met him in Vienna, well dressed and with a Volkswagen. He was with a friend. I couldn't do anything with them. They were older. They were looking for something else. I traveled to Graetz, to a hostel of new immigrants, to join up with someone, because I had no one. There was a redhead there, Pinya, and he asked if I want to go to England, to America or to Israel. He'll arrange everything. He emptied out my pockets. I had money. He took everything. I saw that this is a rotten business, so I ran out the other side of the hotel with another two fellows to the American side. We got to Italy to Bologne, from there to Milan, and then to Israel.

I told my wife let's go and see Birkenau. Had Skidel belonged to Poland we would go to see my parents' house. We traveled to Munich. When I worked with the Germans in Birkenau, one of the told me that he lived in Galting, he was a criminal. A year ago I visited the sons and from there we traveled to Germany. It was pouring rain; she had a brother who was buried in Germany. A 16 year old boy who died after the war, also in Galting. I looked for that criminal, who killed people every day, his name was Oswald Kadok and he was about 30.

We went by train with the help of a friend, Katz, we reached the cemetery and found the grave completely black. She fainted. I took a camera and photographed it. I went to a German at that place so that he would restore the tombstone. I took the tombstone and went to him to renew the letters. I traveled to Munich and brought a book of Psalms and the secretary drew according to the letters. I paid 800 marks. I returned with a new and beautiful tombstone. There were maybe ten tombstones that were toppled. We photographed the tombstone. I was told that Oswald Kadok is a guard in another cemetery. I went with Katz at night, without my wife knowing, and we searched for him. He wasn't there. They sensed that something is happening. I had to avenge.

If I am granted a visa, I'll go to Skidel. I want to go to Auschwitz and from there to Skidel; to show here our house. I sense that it is still standing. A big strong house. It was on the outskirts and wasn't burned, and there were no wars there anymore.

I telephoned the Gentile, six years ago. We sent a letter with photographs. They were afraid.