

Transcript of the Talk by Harry Zarembo in 1986

I am the only one survivor of the Holocaust here in Mobile. I am here 37 years. Nobody, nobody asked me to come and to tell the people what happened. And the young men, Mr. Mutchnick and Mr. Sokol, these two young people, they asked me to come and to say something, and I am glad to the young people what they want now, and I as much as I can tell. I cannot tell you everything what happened in the five years from 41 to 45. As much as I can, to tell you, to explain you, I going explain.

In June 1941 the Nazi Germans occupied Wilno, Poland. The Germans after they had over the Polish people was very antisemitic. They were not good to the Jews. They always have something to say: "swoj do swego," which means that all the people had to abide by the Polish laws, not by the Jewish, and it was very antisemitic to us. Everything what they can do it was done. They come and they say to the people, Bring us everything what you got, and they keep you later and some people what they bring, and they give their jewelry and all their belongings to the, later it was called the Gestapo, they got everything, everythingx that you have. The Germans put up signs that all the Jews, they have to bring the valuables what they got, like gold, silver, transportation like bicycles—we don't have any cars—bicycles. jewelry, everything you have to bring, and if they find somebody, they arrest him. Arrest him, this mean they kill him. The Jews, they put up signs the Jews have to, don't walk on the sidewalks; they have to walk on th street and they have to put some yellow sign in the front and the back. This was very painful. The young boys, Polish, they brung in the police and they show where are the Jewish people, they take him and they arrest him. They ordered later, they put big signs with the order that all rabbis and all lawyers and all big people, doctors, they have to make, they call it a *judenrat*, and these people have to be responsible for all the community. They got about 80, 85 people, doctors, rabbis, lawyers, engineers, and these people they put in city hall and they have to be responsible for the people, for the whole community.

After a short time all the people have to work, nobody can get in the store or something, all the people have to work. The Germans go with the Polish, the young people they give the chocolate and cookies and everything to show where the people live, where the Jewish people and everything. They find the people and put'm in jail, they put'm in jail. After short time, everybody have to work. What I was doing, I was living near to the railroad, and if you have a sign what you are working, they don't bother you. They let you go a little while. I had over there a friend, and I give him some very nice things from home, to give me, like this, just a stamp I work on the railroad. This was, I have, go along, and I can go, nothing to bother.

After they start to build a ghetto, and the ghetto they build in the middle of the city where all the Jewish people used to live. They got the little stores, if somebody was in Jerusalem they maybe see it, this was little houses around, and all the Jewish people live in the same place. They start to build a better ghetto, they blocked the street around and around, and this was over there a population, maybe four thousand five hundred people. These people what they was living over there in these neighborhoods, they took in the night time to jail, and they took them to Ponar, this was a place not far from Wilno where they kill all the people. They have to take off their clothes and they shoot them up.

The Jewish population in Wilno, it was, all the population in Wilno was about 300,000, and of the 300,000 was 60,000 Jewish people, and after they take these people from around, where they start to build the ghetto, they arrest the people, all the children and the old, everybody, and they put them in jail, and later at night time they send them to Ponar. Ponar this was the place where they killed all the people.

After they build up the ghetto—was in July, in July they start to build the ghetto and they finish the ghetto in September. After they put big signs to all the people around in sixty minutes they have to be on the streets on the corners, they going, departing to the ghetto. It was 16,000 people, and all these people what was near to the ghetto they put in the ghetto, these people what was near to the jails they put in the jails, and they bring the people around. 16,000 people in the ghetto, they put up to 17,000. And over three thousand people they already finished up. After we come in the ghetto—we were 17,000 people in a place where were living just 4,000 people. It was too crowded. They come every second, every third day and they come and they take the older people, the sick people, the children, every time, they coming over and they taking the people and they kill the people. After this they start to come to the ghetto every week and they give some, there weere 17,000. they give about 3,000 signs. These people can work, and the other people cannot work. The people what cannot work they going stay here, and the people what that cannot work they making a second ghetto, they put the other people, the people who are working and the other place what they don't working, and between, when they take the people from one ghetto to the other, they kill. Left about 12,000 people. After this time everybody had to work. I used to work by the, they build some houses. The soldiers on the front they build some barracks, when the coming the Russians over there they don't have nothing where to stay. They build the barracks. I was working over there, and all what was gone over there, anything what was doing, the nails and the glass, the window glass, never come on the front. You always take it out and dump it somewhere else. In '43 I cannot, it's very painful and it's very hard for me to say to you, explain everything. I just say something.

In '43 they surrender the ghetto and they took the people, the ladies what they don't have any children, and the men, they put in trucks and bring it on the railroad, they put us on the railroad, on the freight train, on the freight railroad, and they send us to Estonia, 2,000 people. Later they send some more, they bring in Estonia, it was about 6,000 people in Estonia. In Estonia this was near to the Russians. This was very close to Russia. It was very painful over there. They have to get out six o'clock in the morning to work, to stay ... every, have to get some different people, different, where they have to go, these people from one place work, people from another place work, and they have to stay two hours, then come the doctor, and the doctor come and look in the eyes, and they have over there, they build up, they have three camps and in every camp they build up a new house, and they say, they look in the eyes, the doctor, and they say, the men who can work, put them on one side, and the others that cannot work on the other side. Later they put them in the little house and they give them gas and later they burn up the house and the people. It was very painful over there and very hard. And we always think, maybe, maybe somebody come from America or from Russia, and they bomb us. Let me die together with the Nazis. Let them bomb everything, it is better than to come over there, they bring the children and they put the children live in the ground, or other people they take off the clothes, they have to take off the clothes, and later they shoot them up. Sometimes two or three times to shoot him because he just don't die. And they never, never nobody come, never. It was so busy here, the people was so busy, what they always, what? what over there? Nobody think, we think always, we always dream and dream, maybe somebody come, maybe somebody come. Nobody come, nobody bomb, and nobody do nothing.

Later, when the Russians come in very close, over there, and very painful, we lost a lot of people, we lost about 25-30 percent people, we lost, when people died, and some people come in the morning, and it was so cold and it was freeze, and the people say we don't die, and in the evening they give us this soup to eat after we come from work, and they give a piece little of bread. Tomorrow morning, if you hungry you eat up in the evening all that, you got nothing to eat. And if you keep this for tomorrow, the other people see that you sleep, they steal from you any time. You never can get to eat. After my liberation I was 60 pounds, I was weighing 60 pounds, from 145 I was weighing 60 pounds.

Later on the Russians come very close to Estonia. They start to evacuate all the people, and we have to walk about 300 miles, we have to walk to the ships. This was in Estonia, to the ships. It was over there big ships to bring us to Germany, and even after we go, we lose plenty people. Why? They were so tired and they didn't have to eat; three days we was working, and they killed the people. After they killed the people, some people fell and they take two people to take him, and the other people who won't, they didn't want carry, they start to run and after they're running, about two thousand people, they are running, the men die and they leave him, they shoot him up. They leave him on the street. They leave on the street about 200 people, till we come to the ship.

After they come to the ship by the water, they got two ships. They put on ship the people – I want to tell you, this was three camps. One camp, they surrounded the camp and they killed all the people over there. Two camps they was gone, escorted to the border, to the ships, to go back to Germany. They fill up one ship, a needle cannot come in, and they bring the ship on middle the water, on middle the sea, and they sink the ship. And the next ship which was left, the people, they take us with the Germans. If the Germans no want, no can go back, they kill us, too. Now the Germans go back, they take us, about two thousand, two thousand five hundred people, they put on their own ship, with the Germans together, and we come to Germany. In Germany they take us one place, two three places, like Stutthof, Danzig, they take us to work. And they see the people laid up on the sea, people don't can work, like me, that was already tired, they send us to Bergen-Belsen. And over there was the end. We was liberated 15 April 45. The English soldiers they liberate.

I want to say something. I am here 36 years, nobody, nobody ask me to say something, just here, the young two people, like Mutchnick and you, these two people, they interested, so today I come to say something. Nobody would hear me. I started to talk to the people, to our people, to our congregation. Ah, they say, what? forget it. I cannot forget, they can forget but I cannot forget, you see. And very painful for me to speak this. I can't say everything, just how much I can, I just spoke how much I can. Now I want you to read this little piece which was by the end for the ghetto, that they was doing. I was there.

Reader: This is an excerpt that he picked out out of a book that describes what happened in one of the ghettos. "After the liquidation of the ghetto, the Germans left two Jewish work installations outside the walls of the ghetto, Keilis and H.K.P. These installations contained approximately 3000 Jews. Keilis was a fur factory, the Lithuanian word for fur. The Jews worked there making winter clothing for the German army. H.K.P. was the Army vehicle park. The Jews in these installations were also employed by the Army hospital in various chores at the Gestapo headquarters. On March 27, 1944 the Jews from Keilis and H.K.P. were ordered to bring their children to the hospital to receive injections against typhus. Two hundred children were brought by their parents and were taken by the Germans to a hospital in Kraków. The skin and blood from these children were used to heal German soldiers. Mothers who refused to give up their children were immediately shot. On July 2nd and 3rd, 1944, both H.K.P. and Keilis were surrounded by Germans and Lithuanians and all the inhabitants were taken to Ponar to be shot."

H. Thank you.

Q. How did you and Kela meet?

H. Kela was in the same, Kela was there, too. Kela was working in the other camp, not in the same camp.

Q. How did you meet her?

H. It was later, in Bergen-Belsen. We know from Wilno, she was in Wilno and I was in Wilno.

Q. Were those German ships?

H. German ships was over there to evacuate all the people what is working in Estonia. And this we have to come to Estonia, to the ships. It took 200 miles till we come to the ships.

Q. Out of the city that you were brought up in, how many of the 60,000 survived?

H. Three thousand.

Q. A lot of Germans say that they did not know what was going on.

H. They know. They lying. I was, they tell us, in 60 minutes everybody have to go on the corner, I have three children, 2 years, 4 years, and six years, my mother and my wife, and my wife take the small one, the two years, my mother take the four and six years, and I was taking something to eat, how much I can take, 60 pounds, 40 pounds, I take them everything. You see, this was all closer to the ghetto, and the other which was closer to the jail, and overnight they kill them.

Every German know what was there, you see, and I want tell you something, we had was very bad, what the Polish people was very antisemitic, and very hard, they told us, bring everything what you got and you survive, we give you a place to stay over there and you can survive. After they bring them everything, the jewelry, the clothes, everything, they call the Gestapo the next day and they take it all and got everything.

Q. Your wife and three children were killed?

H. Yes, after, you see. When they took us to the three camps, they take just the men and the ladies what they don't have any children. What they have children, they still was in the ghetto. And after they march us to Estonia, they surrender the ghetto and they kill everybody.

Q. How did you get to Mobile?

H. Kela had relatives in Mobile.

Q. What did you do before the war?

H. I had a lumber yard, I sold wood and lumber. This was my own business. Everything was closed, all the stores and everything was closed.