

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MOSHE MOSKOWITZ

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Sylvia Brockmon

Date: August 6, 1988

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Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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MM- Moshe Moskowitz [interviewee]

SB - Sylvia Brockmon<sup>1</sup> [interviewer]

Date: August 6, 1988

*Tape one, side one:*

SB: Tell me when you were born, and about your family and home.

MM: I was born in the year 1922, in Romania. I went to the Jewish Folk *Shula* [school]. Then I rode to the *Gymnasi* [high school]. Then I studied, I studied in a trade-school, and then, when the harder times began to come closer, I decided that I wanted to go to Palestine.

SB: Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood?

MM: Yes.

SB: Maybe you could tell me how was your relationship with the Gentiles.

MM: My family was not a deeply religious family, but we observed the Sabbath, and all the Jewish holidays and customs. It was a Jewish *shtetl* [village].

SB: How did your father make a living?

MM: He was a merchant.

SB: Did he interact with the Gentiles?

MM: Yes. He dealt with the Gentiles. It was a good relationship. He did not feel any antisemitism. There was a long history of antisemitism, but with our relationship, we didn't feel any.

SB: But at this time, before 1938, you went to study, did you notice what was going on against the Jews, the antisemitism, or whether the government was instigating against the Jews?

MM: There were laws that the government made against the Jews, and that affected all the Jews. During my times I did not personally suffer physically. But these laws did affect the Jewish community. Then I approached the Jewish youth organization about preparing myself to emigrate to *Eretz Israel* [then Palestine].

SB: You did not live in Bukhovina or Bessarabia before the Russians occupied the land?

MM: No, I didn't live there. The whole time I lived on the side of Romania that was part of the older Romania.

SB: You did not live in the area of Transylvania Dobruja?

MM: No, I visited there, but I did not live there.

SB: Can you remember the feelings of the Jews, after King Carol had to abdicate and to leave the...

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<sup>1</sup>This interview was conducted in Haifa, Israel in Yiddish and later translated into English by the interviewer, Sylvia Brockmon.

MM: He had to flee Romania.

SB: And what about Antonescu, how was he looked upon?

MM: After King Carol abdicated, it was known that hard times were coming—especially, because Germany was riding high, and it was a danger for all of Europe, especially for Jews. So Jews closed themselves into their specific circles. Only when there was no way to avoid it, did they interact with the non-Jews. When Antonescu came it was known that once again hard times were coming...[unclear]. He tried to satisfy them through military cooperation and excellence. He thought it would be better and easier for them, because he used his army and he accomplished all the obligations expected of every Romanian. But it didn't help any; all were equal before the law, and what happened to one, happened to all.

SB: Did you, perhaps, have any relatives in other parts of Romania, not just where you lived?

MM: I did have relatives, but in old Romania—not in the areas acquired by Romania after the war of 1918.

SB: After the Nazis came to Poland in 1939, were you aware of what the Nazis did to the Jews all over Europe?

MM: Eh...1939, it was still unknown. There was nothing, but. From the war nothing was known. It was known that the Germans had occupied Poland in a few days, and a lot of Polish refugees arrived...that they came to Romania, that they, the Germans, had occupied Poland. But about the Jews, nothing was known.

SB: What they did to the Jews...was not known?

MM: It wasn't, no.

SB: In your family, the pogroms instigated by the "Iron Guard," did your family suffer at all?

MM: No.

SB: No. Did your family have any contact with the Germans who came in...

MM: No.

SB: Also "no." How were the laws that were instituted against the Jews in 1940, how did they affect your family?

MM: Because the Jews lived in small towns in the area, the Jews were concentrated. They were transferred from these places. They were concentrated in the leading cities in the area; and they came with nothing, only those things they could take with them. And they had to live under those circumstances, and managed to make do.

SB: You didn't live in the areas that were taken away from Romania, but you did know that the Jews were expelled from these places, that you did know?

MM: Yes.

SB: But your family was not at all affected?

MM: It did affect them. In these places where they lived, they were taken out of their houses, and into concentrated areas.

SB: Your family, too?

MM: All of them. I told you before.

SB: Your family was transferred?

MM: Yes.

SB: You did not live in the area called “old Romania.”

MM: In 1940 there still was a Jewish community life, free. You could organize, meet together, discuss together, and express religiously, nationalist belief, and Jewish identity...as you wish...just as we had been doing. After the year 1940 came the laws...[unclear]; the uprising of the peasants, the attackers and killers of the Jews...they slaughtered them on the streets. People could manage to exist, but it was already hard to express yourself, and to go on with your life. And I, among the people in the preparatory collective, where we were, could continue to function for some time, as a collective, so everyone worked at different tasks...each at his appointed work. The money was held jointly in a collective bank. We helped each other—one who was weaker was helped by the one who could earn a wage, and so could exist. And then, when all this was no longer possible, two or three people found a place to live, lived collectively, and went to their jobs. And then our comrades managed to meet and get information on what was happening in Palestine, until such time as better times would come and we could all meet again. One, and only one, positive thing happened, which we could accomplish in the year 1941—summer, 1941. We could all be concentrated in an agricultural company where we happened to find work. And the landowner gave us the opportunity to work on his land. And we could live together there for several months, and so carry out Jewish organizational work—Zionist work, and prepare ourselves for Eretz Israel [Palestine], in the realm of working on the land. After a while, a large number of our people were arrested, and were taken to Transnistria; that was the area that belonged to Russia across the Dniestr. There they worked several months. After several months they were brought back and were concentrated in forced labor camps in old Romania. But this is not important in my employment. Even during the time we were not a collective, we still led a Zionist life. We went from one house to another, met with comrades, held discussions about information that was going on in the bigger world. And we had important connections with representatives, delegates, who were in Kurshtan, Constantinople. We wrote letters about what was going on in the camps, what was happening to Jews in Romania. And this gave a certain picture of what is taking place, what could be done to effect a rescue. The whole time we had connections with Israel [Palestine], through the same representatives who were in Constantinople. There were the representatives of the Jewish Agency; a representative of Roosevelt—one Harriman, was the representative. There was Vemya Pomerantz, Professor Arari, who is now in Kibbutz Givat Haim. And with Switzerland we also had connections, with one Nata Schvold. There was a representative from the Israeli [Palestinian] Labor Party, too. We also had support from those groups, from the helpers in Constantinople. Our connections were through a diplomatic courier—he would take a letter

from us to Constantinople, and we would get directions from Constantinople, information as to what was going on and so we would know how to act. The diplomatic courier would photograph the letter that we had received, and later he gave it to the German embassy. They followed us and found out who we were. After a while we were arrested, arrested, and so ended the activities of the two centers, in Constantinople and Switzerland. During the time that we were involved in illegal activities, we smuggled out Jewish children from forced labor camps, gave them false documents, and with them they could manage to get to Bucharest. And there they were processed for illegal immigration. During the period when illegal immigration was organized, we concentrated groups of comrades in different places, smuggled them out from forced-labor camps, gave them false names, and kept them until such times as the opportunities presented themselves to send them off in ships, two or 3 ships, at times. Some ships did go under. From our comrades, some died. But this was also happening when our comrades were in forced-labor camps. We would send our representatives, people who would give them information about what was going on, that they should be ready, that we were working to make it possible for them to come to Palestine, *Eretz-Yisrael*. And that gave them courage and strength to bear all those hardships. Our connections were only with those areas which were at that time, settled by Romanians in Transylvania. Also, at that time there was a large deposit of things that the Jewish community had organized, to be able to help the Jews who were transferred to the Russian side in Transnistria. I also worked there several months, and could live with documents as a Gentile. In the year '44, emissaries from Palestine came. They parachuted with the help of the Anglo-American military that were in the Middle East. At that moment, when they arrived, we received the information and waited for them in the various places where they were to land. We cooperated, so that they could come to Bucharest. There we had arranged for places to stay; and also that they could assume other names—Gentile names—so that they could go on, until the time of liberation—because it could be seen that the Russian front—eh—that the German front in Russia was collapsing. And it was talked about all the time that the Allied forces would defeat Germany, so we helped them. We also helped with “shooting groups,” who were learning how to shoot—in case they would meet, in such times, that they would have to defend themselves, so that they would be able to use a revolver or rifle, or whatever other weapons we could obtain. And some of these we could get from Romanian soldiers, and also from German soldiers. This was already a large group that had organized itself in all of Bucharest—not only in that organization to which I belonged, but a number of other organizations cooperated. I was one of those who had received the addresses of those who were to parachute into Romania.<sup>2</sup> There were six or seven people—we knew when they were supposed to descend. We had

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<sup>2</sup>Nora Levin describes in *The Holocaust*, p. 679, the parachutists who were trained by the British Army, including Hannah Senesch.

to worry about welcoming them. Then I had Aryan papers, so I could travel from one place to another. I also had made contact with the prisoners—some of whom had been captured.

SB: Yes?

MM: Yes, they were put in a prisoner of war camp that was also in Romania. I, with my Gentile name, and Gentile papers, I rode to the capital city in Brasov. There we had a Jewish dentist; Springer was his name, who was the dentist for all of the prisoners. There were 1500, 2000 prisoners, also German, also American, also English. And with his medicines that he could bring in there, we snuck in both letters and gold coins, and maps, so that they could manage to help themselves, and where they could get help. We also helped two or three high, American officers, and also English officers who had to escape, but we didn't want to continue the connection, because we didn't want them to endanger our existence. We directed them to where they could go with maps, and there they had all the necessities, for their existence, so that they could go over the mountains to Yugoslavia. In Yugoslavia there was Tito. Also with this opportunity we transferred information from our Palestinian envoys who were concerned not only about their own people, but with other people as well; and we transferred letters and ideas from Eretz Yisrael [Palestine]. They were married people; they had families, and things like that. The most important thing in our work was—even if he was a non-Jew, he did not have to be involved with a Jewish person, because it was so dangerous. If he were caught, it meant death, both for me and for him. And then in the hotel, it was a Jewish hotel, and I had registered, with all my documents—that I was here from this day to that day. I put them all on my night table near my bed, so that if the police came, they would see that I was there legally; and if not, they should not know that I was there in this and this region, so that they could not make a connection with our activities. The Jews, even the doctor who was in charge of information in the camps, was not certain that I was a Jew—because my name was an Aryan name. When they came, they were successful, and arrived safely; we took them to Bucharest. We had prepared living quarters for them there, and Gentile papers and they could live as Jews. (There are some books that they themselves have written about those experiences, their stories). And when they came the activities increased. I told you before, that we smuggled out young people from the camps and concentration camps, and brought them to Bucharest. And there tens and hundreds came at the times when the emissaries managed to have 3 small small ships arrive at the harbor that were to sail to *Eretz Israel*. We developed cultural activities, and we were successful in arranging, in a short period of time, according to a Jewish decision, a Jewish cultural program with singing. And I concentrated on this for a thousand, or 700 people, and this was a renewal of the Jewish spirit. [He is weeping now]. What else could one want?

SB: In 1943, or a little later, did you or your family have any contact with the Federation of Jewish Committees, or with a Mr. Fielderman?

MM: Fielderman, Fielderman, there was—yes, the Zionist organization had ties with—because Fielderman had helped us, since he had been officially recognized by the Romanians, so he was capable of...

SB: Were you aware of the existence of the Transnistria Council?

MM: Yes.

SB: Tell me about it.

MM: During the time when we were spread out all over Bucharest, we gathered all kinds of Jews from Bucharest who had living quarters, because they belonged to [unclear] or the Zionist parties. At a given time they were concentrated in a camp in order to send them to Transnistria, but before that, the Jews had organized with the Germ-, with the Romanians, with Antonescu's help, so a "*Machsan*" [Hebrew for storage area], a deposit area, where people had collected different items from Jews, and from there an attempt could be made to send them to Transnistria, where there was a high Romanian official, with whom we had connections, with knowledge of Romanian authorities. The objects were to be put in boxes, and we would try to get them to the prisoners in forced labor camps, and concentration camps, to use in the winter time, so that they may survive the severe weather. So I worked at this collection point for several months, and I know that this was important work. I knew, in person, the important official who was supposed to take these items across. And later on, when I traveled to the area, I found out that some areas had received the help, and others had not gotten the help that the Jewish Committee had arranged for them. But we knew that some of our comrades who had Transnistria-type names had become involved in certain camps, and sought to smuggle out Jews, as had been done from Transylvania, during the time of the Hungarians. And we tried to duplicate that kind of rescue operation. Our comrades had brought out a good many from the camps in Romania—they did exist, really, really. We knew that the messengers from Israel [Palestine], had arrived, and we sought to smuggle out several thousand children from Poland. I don't know what the results were. I believe that not many were taken out, but those children who were rescued were taken to particular places, where they got a Jewish orientation and facts about *Eretz Yisrael* [Palestine], and then they were taken out to Israel.

SB: And those children, who were smuggled out, what happened to their parents, were they shot?

MM: There still were children, whose parents could not protect them, so the parents agreed to have the children smuggled out, and after they were liberated, they would be reunited with their children.

SB: Were you aware that so many Jews were murdered in Rumania?

MM: We were aware of what was happening. The emissaries from Israel arrived, and Jews from Poland came from diverse areas and they related what was taking place.

SB: In what year was this, do you remember?

MM: In 1944.

SB: 1944, and before that?

MM: Before that, it wasn't known.

SB: It was not known.

MM: We did know that there were German camps.

SB: That you knew.

MM: But what was going on—that they slaughtered, and murdered, and that they burned, that was not known.

SB: That you didn't know.

MM: It was not known.

SB: And those children that you brought to Israel [Palestine], do you know them, do you have contact?

MM: We have contact with those leaders who were there, and we often get together in the various *Landsmanshuften*, [hometown associations] that have been set up. We meet every so often, when they have get-togethers. A number have already taken place. But ours was not the only organization. There were a number of such organizations involved in the rescue. And every organization has contact with the children whom they rescued. Eh, I, myself, was connected with one particular emissary from Israel. His name is Shuyke Don. Shuyke Don had a particular plan of action for the local area. It was to be passed on. I received it, that is, it came to my address. He and his partner, and also three or four other groups who were successful in landing here. With him we worked to organize in several areas on building *aliya* [emigration to Israel], to help organize communes, and to set up *hachsharas* [agricultural training farms]. We did get a lot of groups for the agricultural communes, in preparation for working in Israel. Also we had to work on the military side. On the 23rd of August, in the year 1944, Romania was liberated. I was the connection with our Jewish—our Jewish—prisoners. The prisoners were in the American-British zones that had been captured, and they were concentrated in a large place. On the 23 of August, there was a great danger that the Germans would bombard them. And on the way, traveling to our comrades, we were bombarded. Nothing happened to us, but a few days later there was suffering from this. During this time, when we were there, we had to provide money for the thousands of prisoners, where they were concentrated in those zones, so that they could spread out to different places, and be able to take care of themselves until such time as we could get them out. I was the one who held the money for various means. [tape ends suddenly]