

From the Testimony of Armand and Edith Zilz on Rumours about Extermination in Auschwitz-Birkenau

Q: Now let's come back to the Jewish community. We know that until 1942, '43, people weren't aware of Auschwitz. They weren't aware of what was truly coming on the part of the Germans. Yes?

interviewee 2: 1941 you mean? '42 was deportation already. In '42 in June we knew already what's going on in Auschwitz.

Q: Okay. Did you know what was happening in Poland? Did you know what was happening in the Warsaw Ghetto, for instance? Were you aware? By 1941?

interviewee 1: '41 I would say no. I would tell you even in 1942 we Jewish people, most of them we thought it is just a labor camp.

interviewee 2: In the beginning.

interviewee 1: In the beginning.

interviewee 2: But by June, July we got the first letter from Auschwitz.

interviewee 1: And then we got letters from Opola, from Oswiecim we got letters from these people, official and not official, and they didn't say that people is dying, but they was writing. For example, "My son is together with his uncle somewhere" and we knew that somewhere is already dead, so in this way we knew already. Let's say like my wife said, from June, July we knew already in 1942 that that is not a labor camp. This is something where...

Q: These were letters that the Germans were having them write to make you think that everything was wonderful.

interviewee 1: Yes. Sure.

Q: That people are able to communicate despite this.

interviewee 1: But all in the beginning.

interviewee 2: May I interrupt? In 1942 in September I got a letter from my aunt from Opola, a card. The card was written in two parts - I don't know why. First she writes about her husband and her two children who was with her and then by the end she writes something else and on the end she signs: "Your widow, Rav." So between....

Q: What was her name?

interviewee 2: Salina Rav.

Q: So she signs it: "The widow Rav"?

interviewee 2: Yes. So I should know that the uncle is dead.

Q: Okay, so by late '41, '42 it's becoming clear?

interviewee 1: I got a letter from my aunt also in 1941, '42, from Korner. She wrote in that card - always pink cards - she wrote: "Your uncle is employed at the undertaker, but he is busy the whole day." That's mean that people are dying.

Q: Let me just make you think a minute. When did you know - you were getting these cards - when did it become fairly clear that the deportations or the so-called labor camps, etc. were leading to annihilation?

interviewee 2: What we are talking about, these cards, all these cards, came only in the fall, not before.

Q: The fall of...?

interviewee 2: 1942. But in 1942 in June a girl who was deported - somehow she get befriended with one of the Germans there and she wrote a letter and that letter he mailed. Rugina Klein. And that's how we found out the first time about the gas chambers and everything.

Q: So there was a clear letter?

interviewee 2: Yes.

Q: And that came in 1942.

interviewee 2: Yes, sometime in the summer.

interviewee 1: In '42, I couldn't tell you exactly if it was June, July, but in the second half of 1942 we knew already what it is.

Q: Did anyone have a radio, a short-wave radio? Did anyone hear the Czechoslovak government in exile? Was there any information coming in?

interviewee 2: We had opportunity if we wanted. There were a couple of gentile people where you could go listen to the radio. You personally couldn't have a radio in the house.

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