

From the Testimony of Josef Govrin: Destruction and Orphanhood Confronted Me

Josef Govrin, born in 1930 in Romania, was deported to the ghettos and camps in Transnistria (east of Romania), and was liberated by the Red Army in December 1944. He immigrated to Palestine in 1947, after being held in detention in Cyprus.

"The liberation took two to three days, as I said before... VE Day, the ninth of May, found us in Czernowitz. I was ill, probably from vitamin and calcium deficiencies, and I had been confined to bed for about six weeks. They tried to cure me, but I was very weak.

However, on VE Day I gathered my strength and went outside... I walked in the streets of Czernowitz on 10 May, to see the soldiers marching past, parading in the street and singing victory songs. The singing was very weak...

"I was better, but I was very weak. And while I was walking towards the soldiers I grasped the destruction the war had caused. It was a very personal experience for me, perhaps because I had hoped all through the years that we were in the ghetto that my father was still alive in spite of everything. On VE Day, the destruction caused by the war and my orphanhood were revealed to me. Then I saw the destruction caused by the war perhaps in a much more realistic way than I had before. The destruction was actually all around me day and night, but only on VE Day did I notice it in the very street I was walking in... Then I understood as a child the enormity of the destruction... and truly, that day of victory is engraved in my memory to this very day as a day of... not as a day of celebration!"

Source: Kleiman, Yehudit and Shpringer-Aharoni, Nina (eds.), *The Pain of Liberation*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1995, pp. 32-33.