

## From the Testimony of Jan Burke on the Cultural life in the Ghetto

Q: You just spoke about this cultural life. You spoke about why the Nazis let this cultural life to be so flourishing.

A: First of all, I think they needed it for their own propaganda, for their own purpose. Secondly, we were in the heart of Europe, we were in the heart of their occupied country, the "protectorate". They could not make Auschwitz in Theresienstadt. That would leak out, you know, even if they made I don't know how many fences around, so I have the feeling they gave in to the Jews because first instruments were not allowed. Suddenly there was an orchestra. So why? If they would have wanted, there wouldn't have been one violin in it, so they said, "The more they do it the less they know what will happen to them." You see what I mean?

Q: So it was a matter of deception, to deceive the Jews.

A: Yes. I mean, it didn't cost them anything. They had them caught, we were caught, fifty-six to seventy thousand and there was - we didn't escape. One escaped and they put us all out in a field - you know that story - and they surrounded us and we had to count all day, you know, just to scare us. You know, that was a very bad day. There we were scared to be shot, you know, like which we didn't know that what was happened in Poland, you know, the pogrom and so on, but otherwise I had the feeling they didn't want to do it too harsh because they had their programs. They said, "Next week - twelve thousand. In two weeks, six thousand. So let them play the violin, let them speak about Goethe or let them speak about Chapek," you know, the Czech writer, "or let them talk about Judaism." And the Jews, of course for us, you know, it was something very, very...you know, in the evening we went like you go to the opera, we went to the theatre. It was fantastic. You know the feeling - if you stay at home you are hungry. That way you forgot you are hungry, for two or three hours and you came home with a positive impression.

Q: And do you remember that Nazis also attended sometimes this...?

A: Oh yes. As I told you, I was a very known football player and the SS, when I gave a goal, I looked at the tribune, the SS, and they were applauding. I was their guy, you know, like today Maccabi or what - they go and play in Limoges volleyball. I was very known because we were very young and we won every match, you know. We were good because we were a solid group.

**Source: Yad Vashem Archives, VT-1341**