

**PAWLOWICZ FAMILY PAPERS, circa 1920s-1950s
1999.49**

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW
Washington, DC 20024-2126
Tel. (202) 479-9717
e-mail: reference@ushmm.org

Appendix A. Biography of Rose Pohl

The following biography of Rose Pohl (born Rucha Tosk, 1925-) is housed in the donor files of the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum. The author of the biography is unidentified.

ROSE POHL TOSK.

Rose's family was a rare exception among the millions of victims of the Holocaust. They lost their father, but *their mother, the four daughters and a son survived*. Most other families lost at least the parents and siblings and, in many cases, only one member of a family survived

Pabianice

7/26/1925

Rose was born in Pabianice, Poland. She was fourteen years old when World War II began. Until that time, she had experienced a normal childhood. Rose had just finished seventh grade in the public school when rumors were heard that Germany was going to invade Poland. On September 1, 1939, the invasion took place. In a very short time, the country was occupied by the German Army. Conditions immediately deteriorated.

A ghetto was established in the middle of the city of Pabianice. It was surrounded by barbed wire, and was under constant surveillance by the German Army. Since Rose's family home was outside the ghetto, they were forced to leave their home and move into the ghetto in the fall of 1939.

Rose's mother, father, three sisters and one brother were all forced to live in one room. In the winter of 1939-1940, conditions were terrible. Food rationing started, and every single day they were marched out of the ghetto to work. Rose cleaned houses and did laundry in town, and at the police station she was forced to scrub floors. For this, she received little rations.

Rose lived in her home town ghetto for two years. During that time, a few selections occurred. Selections meant that young men and women were taken to work camps. The young man who was later to become Rose's husband, Max Pohl, was one of the first 250 boys taken from Rose's hometown. Max was among only eighteen of these boys to survive the war.

Every once in a while during Rose's two years in the ghetto, everyone was rounded up, put in rows of five, and another type of selection took place. All of the sick people were taken out of the ghetto. No one knew or understood where they were being taken.

In May 1942, soldiers came to Rose's house and took her father. He was never seen again, and to this day, no one knows what happened to him. He was a young, tall, handsome man. Rose explains that she was young and full of life at the time her father was taken away, and she did not really understand what it meant. The older she gets, the more Rose misses her father. It is very difficult for her to envision him, and she finds this very distressing. She feels guilty about not speaking more of her father, but she and he were very young when he died. Therefore, she really doesn't have much to remember.

Three days after her father was taken, a selection took place in the marketplace of the ghetto. People were told that they were just going to be counted, and that it would take only a few hours. They were told to pack a few essentials, and to leave everything else behind. Of course, they were not told the truth. They were there for hours, it got dark, it started to rain. They were hungry and crying. They were even beaten.

At the marketplace, the young people who were strong were sent to one side, and the children and older people were sent to another. Rose's eleven and a half year-old brother, who, because he was tall for his age and appeared older, was sent with the men. At 1:00 a.m., those selected were loaded into streetcars. Rose and her family were among them. Although they did not know their destination, Rose and her sisters told their mother that she must stay with them. Rose believes it is a miracle that her mother was able to stay with her daughters throughout the entire war. Their destination turned out to be the Lodz ghetto, fourteen kilometers away.

Lodz

Once in the Lodz ghetto, their brother was able to join them. They were assigned to a small house, which they shared with two young ladies. Because the conditions in the ghetto were so terrible, Rose thought this was the cruelest thing the Germans would do to them. But she later learned that her life in the Lodz ghetto was not the worst she would endure.

The ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire, and the Germans watched it day and night. The gates were used only to bring in food and supplies. No one went near the gates. If you did, you were shot. There was little clothing, and food was rationed, and so scarce, that people hid corpses under beds so that they could use the deceased's ration card to get more bread. This was effective until the corpse began to smell, and the people feared typhus in the house. Only then was the corpse buried.

Everyone had to register for work, and you worked seven days a week. You had to be productive, or you were shipped out of the ghetto. Fortunately, Rose and her sisters were young and strong. Rose worked in a straw factory, braiding straw that would be made into shoes for the German soldiers at the front lines.

Rose and her family were in the Lodz ghetto for two years. They tried very hard to keep up their spirits. They felt lucky they were still together. They would sing, teach other other, and pray that they would survive to tell the world what they had been through, although they did not believe that they would.

Old people and young children began to disappear. Selections were made, and those chosen were sent to Chelmno. Rumor had it that they were to be gassed in the ovens. Rose could not believe people could do such a horrible thing to others just because they were Jewish.

Chaim Rumkowski, himself a prisoner, was the president and leader of the Lodz ghetto. He had his own officers, including police. They watched over the ghetto and kept it running. When people started to die from disease and starvation, Chaim Rumkowski could not keep up the work force needed by the Germans. Even though transports brought 20 to 30,000 people from small surrounding villages to the Lodz ghetto every two weeks, it still was not enough. This caused Rumkowski serious problems with the Germans.

In August 1944, a round-up took place in the Lodz ghetto. The people were kept in the jail overnight. At 4:00 a.m., they were marched to the railroad and put in cattle cars. The doors were locked and the train rolled away from Lodz. They were packed in like animals, men and women together. They had no water. Many fainted, but the Germans paid no attention. They were not told where they were going.

Rose's oldest sister worked for a famous doctor, who was a close friend of Rumkowski. When the family was called for the round-up, this sister was not called. Since they had been told they were just being called to be counted, she did not go, but stayed behind in the house. But at 4:00 a.m., just as the others were being marched to the train, she showed up. She told her sisters that their grandmother had come to her in a dream and told her to join them, that she should not stay behind, that they should all be together, and so she volunteered to join them.

The entire Lodz ghetto was being closed and everyone was being sent to Auschwitz. A few hundred people hid in bunkers in Lodz and survived. Somehow, the Germans did not find them. Later, it was found out that Rumkowski and the doctor Rose's sister worked for, were taken straight from the Lodz ghetto to the ovens of Auschwitz.

Auschwitz

The S.S. were waiting. They yelled at the people to get out of the cattle cars quickly. Many people were shot. Immediately, there was a selection. Men were separated from women. The children were sent with the older men and women. Rose's brother was separated from them, but the girls made up their minds that they would all stay together. From the moment they arrived in Auschwitz, their mother became the fifth sister. Before the selection, they pinched their mother's cheeks to try to make her look younger and healthier, and they put her in the middle of their row of five. As they marched, they could smell the fumes from the ovens. They saw men pulling old people to the crematorium. They quickly learned that no one comes out of those buildings alive.

They were marched to barracks that held 1,000 people. They were all made to strip off the clothing and shoes that they were wearing from Lodz. They were told they were going to be cleaned up. Many had lice, which was known to carry diseases like typhus. They had to line up, and every second woman had her hair shaved off. They did this to try and break their spirit and to confuse them. Rose and her mother kept their hair, but Rose's three sisters had theirs shaved off. They were taken to the showers. At this point, they did not know what the showers would bring.

For some, the showers were not water. Instead, it was gas that came out of the nozzle, which caused them to suffocate and die. After the shower, they were given one gray and navy striped uniform and a pair of wooden shoes to wear. They were also given a rag, to be used as a blanket or towel.

There was a heating unit in the middle of the barrack. If you did not obey the S.S., you could be laid across it and beaten. Twice a day there was an appel, roll call, when everyone was counted. All numbers had to match, to show that no one was missing. This could take many hours if someone was not in line. Even if a missing person had died, their body had to be counted in the appel.

Rose and her sisters did not work at Auschwitz. They spent two weeks in quarantine. During that time, they were never left alone. Rose mentions that they did not get a number tattooed on their arms, as was often done at Auschwitz, because of the lack of time. By now, the Russian army was already invading Poland.

Rose feels strongly that the Germans did everything they could to try to destroy their minds, only because they were Jews. Had the Germans ever found out about their mother, Rose feels they would have taken her away just to break the spirit of her daughters. Rose and her sisters always stayed together. Their mother was always placed in the middle of their row of five.

There was another selection, and those capable of working were sent to another camp. Those left behind were sent to the ovens to die. At the railroad station at Auschwitz, the Germans had large barking dogs, and their revolvers were always drawn. The prisoners were ordered to march very, very fast. If someone fell, he or she would be trampled or shot. As they marched, a German soldier pulled their mother aside and asked her age. She said she was thirty-four. The German answered that she was at least forty-four, but he let her go. He was correct.

Again, they did not know where they were going. Again, they were put on cattle cars. There were 120 girls in each car, sixty on each side, with two S.S. to watch them. The S.S. had food and water, but the girls had none. The only time they got air was when the doors were opened. As the cattle train passed one railroad stop, a young boy in the station pointed to the open cars and asked his mother, "What are these?" The mother answered, "They are monkeys." The boy said, "I have never seen so many monkeys at one time."

In 1944, trains carrying wounded German soldiers often crossed paths with trains carrying prisoners. The soldiers received priority, so the prisoners' cars would sit for long periods of time, waiting for them to pass before being able to move on. The next stop was:

Bergen Belsen

Because the Red Army was getting near Auschwitz, many of the people from Auschwitz needed to be brought to Bergen Belsen. By the time they arrived at Bergen Belsen in the fall of 1944, they were half dead from the trip. They were made to march from the train to the camp. They were the first to open this camp, so they had to live in tents with straw on the ground. Each prisoner was given two blankets, and one rag which was to be used as a washcloth/towel. They worked to put up more tents and clean the camp. They were told they were going to start building real barracks. Even a crematorium was built to burn all the dead bodies.

The rations were horrible. In the morning, they were given black coffee which was made from the S.S.'s leftover coffee grounds, and one piece of dark grain bread that was like clay, and very difficult to swallow. Lunch was kohlrabi soup, which was essentially just water. That was all they received until the next morning. If someone tried to save some bread for later in the day by hiding it, it was always found and stolen by other inmates. If it was found by the S.S., it was thrown away.

If someone got sick, there was the possibility of being taken away. Fearing that reality, when one girl got very sick, the lady in charge of the tent did not want to send her to the hospital. Instead, she came to Rose's family, knowing that they were five, and that they had ten blankets and five rags between them, and asked them to give up one rag and one blanket. Since they were all sleeping together, she felt they could share. Rose's mother asked Rose to give up one of her possessions. As prisoners, they had no underpants, no stockings, they had nothing, but Rose gave up her only rag and one blanket.

They stayed in Bergen Belsen for ten weeks. When they were being evacuated, they were rounded up from their tents, and told they were going to a working camp inside Germany. By this time, they thought they were the only people alive from their family. They had no idea what had happened to their father or brother.

In order to prepare to leave Bergen Belsen, the two blankets and one rag they had been given upon arrival had to be returned. Now Rose had a problem. She had given her rag and one blanket to the woman who ran the tent, but as they were about to leave, the woman denied having taken them from Rose. What was Rose to do? The woman denied taking them. The S.S. did not care that Rose's sisters were leaving without her. They only wanted to destroy minds, not have anyone think of family. For the Germans, it was better if families were separated.

And so, Rose had to watch as her sisters were marched off, and another woman took her place in their line of five. Finally, after much crying and carrying on, the S.S. man said Rose was driving him crazy, and that she could go and join the rest of the group. But by now they were so very far ahead, how was she to catch up with them? What if she was separated from them, and they were put on a different train, and sent to a different camp? With the Germans watching, and with their dogs and guns aimed at the group, Rose ran to the line, and with the help of the girls, she moved forward from row to row toward her family. The girls moved aside so she could catch

up. She ran forward in the middle of the rows, and every girl stepped back until she caught up with her family. As they marched, the German shepherd dogs were barking. Remembering that experience has left Rose afraid of dogs to this day.

They got to the train station. They had no bread or water. They were pushed onto the cattle cars, and with two S.S. men guarding each car, they left. They were worn out, depressed, sick, hungry skeletons. They traveled for a long time. It was 1944, and in the train stations they entered, there was often confusion. The Germans knew by now that Germany was losing the war, but the prisoners still did not know. No one thought to resist, their only thought was to exist, their minds no longer worked

SALZWEDEL

After many days on the train, they arrived at Salzwedel, Germany. From the train, they were taken to barracks, where they were each assigned a bunk bed with a straw mattress. There were fifty to sixty people to a room. A German lady was in charge of the barrack. She would not allow Rose and her sisters to sleep together as they had in the past. They had only one blanket, and it was cold, but the woman did not care if they froze. Rose's mother came to Rose's bunk because she was so cold. She slept with Rose to try to keep warm. This angered the German matron. She hit Rose's mother, and made her go back to her own bunk. Rose feels her mother suffered doubly, because she was unable to say a word and could not protect her young daughters from the cruelties of their imprisonment.

There was an appel.

Everyone was assigned to the same ammunitions factory to make bullets for the German army. They worked in two shifts of twelve hours each, one during the day and one at night. They worked there all winter, and they worked very hard. Their hair and fingernails did not grow as a result of being exposed to the powder that was put into the bullets.

At the factory, they received black coffee, once again made from the Germans' leftover coffee grounds, and one slice of bread. After work, they were given some watery soup. Each day, as the girls marched to work and passed the girls coming off their shift, they had a routine. They would ask in Polish, "What kind of soup is there today?" They would always answer, "It was just water." Rose used to tell her mother that when they were liberated, she was going to eat her bread dry, with no butter. To this day, Rose can live on dry bread. Their bodies deteriorated even more, and there was a lot of lice, sickness and death.

The Germans stored carrots, beets and potatoes for the winter in underground storage areas. One day, two girls got caught stealing potatoes. Returning from the factory, the others saw them hanging, with signs around their necks that said, "We are thieves."

In 1945, they heard rumors that Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen were worse than when Rose and her family had been there. They could not believe that the Germans were so cruel, and that the world was not doing anything to help. They would pray to God that the camps would be bombed. Right up until the end of the war, the sick were taken by truck from the hospitals and killed.

The Germans knew liberation by the Americans was at hand, so both the army and the people abandoned the town of Salzwedel. On April 14, 1945, Rose was liberated, along with her mother and sisters, by the American Army, 84th Infantry Division. Since the electricity had been cut off before the liberation, the American soldiers ran down the barbed wire surrounding the camp with tanks. The prisoners ran out like wild people and kissed the soldiers. They could not believe they had remained alive to see liberation. They were free! They ran into the town, into stores and bakeries. Rose found a buggy, and brought it back with bread for her family. Those who ate too much got sick. Now, finally, they were able to tell everyone that their oldest sister was really their mother. People told them that they now understood why this sister had been so good to them.

Later, the Americans put the barbed wire back up, and kept watch over them. After a taste of freedom, they protested being kept in the camp. However, the Americans explained that it was for their own protection. The Germans had returned to their homes, sometimes staying in the basements, and there was still a very real danger they could be killed. The barracks were burned down, due to the infestation of lice and other diseases. The people were put in a very nice camp that had been for German pilots.

They stayed until Germany surrendered. Germany was divided, and Salzwedel fell under Russian occupation. The Americans gave them a choice. They could go with the Americans, or stay with the Russians. Rose's mother made the decision not to stay with the Russians.

They were taken to Zeilsheim, a displaced persons camp, near Frankfurt, Germany. They hoped that Rose's father was alive and looking for them. They did not know what had happened to him, or to their brother. Unfortunately, they were never reunited with Rose's father, but in November 1945, they found their brother in an orphanage. He did not know they were all alive. He was in Italy, about to be sent to Palestine. He met someone from his hometown who told him his sisters were alive. He came to Germany and joined them.

Max was also liberated in 1945. He remembered that he had an aunt, his mother's sister, in Paris. He went there and managed to find her. While in Paris, he saw in a Jewish newspaper that Rose and other members of her family were listed as Salzwedel concentration camp survivors. He returned to Germany, looked for and found Rose. They were married in May 1946. They stayed in the displaced persons camp until February 1949, at which time their quota number finally came up, allowing them to go the United States. However, a sponsor was needed for this to become a reality. Fortunately, Max found another aunt living in Buffalo, New York, who agreed to sponsor them.

February 17, 1999 marked the 50th anniversary of Rose and Max Pohl's arrival in the United States. At that time, no one wanted to hear about the Holocaust. Rose now feels that, 53 years later, she has to tell her true story, even though it is very difficult to do so. She cries softly as she remembers how the Holocaust robbed her of her youth and of her schooling. She grew up in the camps.

Today, Rose is the proud mother of a son who is a rabbi, and of twin daughters. She also has seven grandchildren. She is proud and happy that her children were brought into the world in the United States.

In 1996, Rose was invited back to Salzwedel with her husband. There she placed candles and flowers at a monument built at the site of the camp.

She asks you to remember her story, to remember what she has told you, so that no one can deny the Holocaust.

You have now read the testimony of a woman who survived the Holocaust. A woman who feels it is her obligation to tell the whole world. She is living proof of the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Holocaust.