

FELD, Rose
RG-50.029*0013
One videotape

Abstract

Rose Feld was born on July 15, 1932 in Katowice, Poland. Although her family strictly followed Jewish traditions, they lived in a mixed community of Jews and non-Jews. Rose does not recall experiencing any anti-Semitism as a child. When the war broke out in the fall of 1939, Rose and her family were vacationing at a farm in Frysztak (Freistadt), a Jewish community where her grandparents lived. Because the Germans had declared Katowice free of Jews, Rose's family was forced to remain in Frysztak.

The Germans established a Judenrat to govern the Jewish community, but they eventually took more direct actions. They made displays of killing Jews and finally created a ghetto in 1940. In 1942, the Germans began to gather the Jews for deportation. Soon after, the Germans began shooting the town's Jews into mass graves and Rose lost her grandfather and several aunts and uncles. Rose and her family went into hiding, in a forest bunker, for nineteen months.

After the defeat of the Germans, the family finally emerged from their hiding place and a Russian convoy took them to Rzeszów, Poland. When the war was over, they returned to Katowice, and Rose attended a school where she was the only Jew in her class. Rose and her family realized the dangers of remaining in Poland and managed to obtain false papers to leave for Bratislava. With the assistance of a guide, they went to Budapest and briefly lived in a survivors' community. From there, they went on to a DP camp in Salzburg, Austria, where they stayed for four years. They finally moved to America in 1948 to live with cousins in New York. Rose eventually finished high school and married another Holocaust survivor.

Tape 1

0:00

Rose describes her childhood in Katowice, Poland, growing up in an Orthodox Jewish family, and going to the synagogue every Saturday. She describes her home town as cultured, because of its many theatres and movie houses. She recalls living in a mixed community of Poles and Germans though hers was the only Jewish family. She says that her father was a textile merchant and, her mother stayed at home to raise their family; that the family was close, and her brother, aunts, and uncles lived in the same town. She recalls that the war began in the fall of 1939, when she was almost seven years old and about to start school.

2:50

Rose is asked about anti-Semitism in her town and responds that she was young and unaware if it existed. She states that the Jewish community was fairly large and consisted mostly of followers of modern orthodoxy. She does not recall any organized Jewish activities, but says that her family strictly observed holidays, kept kosher, and her father did not work on the Sabbath. She recalls playing with Jewish and Polish children and spending summers at her grandparents' farm outside the city, in a small town called Frysztak in Galicia.

6:00

Rose says that at the beginning of the war, her mother and brother were with her on the farm. She says that the family did not return to the city but moved in with her grandparents in Frysztak, a community of 1,500 Hasidic Jews. Rose compares the town to the one in “Fiddler on the Roof” – it had no sidewalks, buggies lined the streets, and there were Jewish men in long, black coats and women covered in kerchiefs. She states that at first, there was no ghetto, that the German presence was only felt when they set up an office, and that her father went to work in it, cleaning boots and doing other chores to make a living. She states that a Judenrat, a committee of elders, was established to run the Jewish community under German supervision, and that things went smoothly for a time. She explains that her family could not return to their home, because the Germans had declared it Judenrein (free of Jews) and that everyone had left with as many possessions as they could carry. Rose says that Jews were not allowed to attend school and that parents hired a teacher who taught the rudiments of grammar and math in small groups.

9:20

Rose states that the German presence was most strongly felt on the High Holy Days, when atrocities occurred. She describes the ghetto, where she lived from 1940 to 1942, and says that though it had no physical walls, the Nazis threatened to shoot any Jew who left. She also describes some of the anti-Semitic edicts implemented by the Germans.

14:00

She talks about the Friday when the Jews were ordered to gather at the market and were forced gather in groups for deportation designated by age, number of children, and work abilities. She recalls that older people, including her grandfather, were taken away first in trucks followed by those with three or more children. She says that the men were all taken to Majdanek, that they were not admitted because it was late in the day, and that they were then sent back to Katowice. She says that the following day, some farmers told the Jews about large graves they had seen in the forest. Rose also recalls a day when several Jews were lined up, ordered to undress, and were shot by the Germans while they played music. She says that some of these victims were buried alive and that her grandfather, aunts, and uncles were killed that day.

19:09

Rose’s father created a hiding place in a cellar for his family and some friends—fifteen people in total and that they stayed there until one evening after midnight, when an uncle who was also in hiding, opened their trap door to tell them of recent deportations of many Jews.

24:42

Rose says that when they left the cellar, she had no clothes or shoes and that they walked towards a farm that her grandmother had told them about. She recalls that they were stopped by a policeman but that they got away by bribing him with her mother’s ring. Rose continues to describe their life, in the forest, and in the homes of farmers who were willing to hide them and bring them food at night. She recalls that even though many Poles were anti-Semitic and could gain rewards for turning in Jews, many still helped Jews.

37:00

Rose describes the building of underground forest bunkers to hide in during the winter and talks about the hardships they faced and the constant risks of discovery.

48:00

She says that they lived in the forest bunker for nineteen months and that her father and uncle maintained a twenty-four hour vigil to watch out for Germans. She recalls that they finally emerged after hearing shooting between the Germans and the Russians. She recalls that she could not walk after nineteen months of crouching and that her father carried her. She states that they were picked up by a Russian convoy and taken to the Polish town of Rzeszów.

1:05:00

Rose says that when Poland was freed from the Germans, the family returned to their hometown. She recalls that the Russians gave them a beautiful apartment with real beds, a refrigerator, and food. Rose talks about going to school for the first time in her life. She says that the family did not want to remain in Poland under the Russians; that they obtained false papers to leave for Bratislava; and that they hired a guide to take the family behind Russian lines into Budapest. Rose recalls going from Budapest to the American Zone where the family was treated well. She says that the family lived in a DP camp in Salzburg for four years until 1948, when they were able to emigrate and to live with cousins in New York.

1:20:40

Rose says that once she arrived in America, she completed high school by attending night school while working. She says that she married another survivor, that they had two daughters, and that it is for them and for her grandchildren that she wanted to tell her story.