

Good morning.

Good morning

It's very nice to see you, Rosette. Thanks for coming.

And I'm very pleased to be here. Thank you very much--

You're very welcome.

--for inviting me.

Tell me what was your name at birth?

My name at birth was [? Reizl Scheinbein ?] And the Hebrew name was Shoshana. And this is the name I went by when I was in Poland on all my report cards. They used the name of [? Reizl Scheinbein ?].

I see.

And later as years went on, you'll see I had a lot of different versions of my name, depending which country I lived in. But [? Reizl ?] was the Jewish name. I was named after some grandma or something. And Shoshana, I don't know. I never used it, but they told me this would be the equivalent of Shoshana.

And your name now?

My name is now Rosette Konick. Want me to spell it for you?

Yes.

K-O-N-I-C-K, and my first name is R-O-S-E-T-T-E.

And when were you born?

I was born January 17, 1929, in Rovno, Poland, which is now the Ukraine. And we lived in Malyn'sk. It's a small town, 60 kilometers from Rovno.

And it's north of Rovno, is that right?

It is north, yes. It's on a railroad track between Rovno and Sarny. And the reason why they have a station there, because they had a lumber mill, so they had the trains coming with nothing particular but Malyn'sk-- we didn't have electricity or anything. But because they cut down a lot of lumber and mill them, so it stopped. And as far as the Jewish population, we were only about maybe 10 families.

In Malyn'sk?

In Malyn'sk. They were essentially just for surviving the Jewish culture or something. There was the shoet. And then there was the-- what you call it, a teacher-- and all of this in here. And basically 10 families-- about 10, 12-- and that's how it stayed until the war.

Tell me something. Why were you born in Rovno, and then you were raised in Malyn'sk? Do you know?

Oh yes, I do know. Malyn'sk had no doctors, had no hospital-- it was nothing. Rovno was a city with electricity and doctors. And whenever I would be sick or anyone need medical attention, we would go to Rovno. So my mother knew

that I would go-- this is where-- in fact, I had a little brother who died at birth. But Rovno is our center of culture, of family, and any other assistance we needed. We would go to Rovno.

So your mother went to Rovno order to-- did she have you in the hospital? Or she had you at--

Yes, it--

She did.

--was a hospital. We had relatives. We had cousins. And then apparently, she went there earlier before the date, and she just waited there. And I don't remember much about my birth. I cannot tell you.

[LAUGHTER]

But I know when my little brother was born, and I was there with her, and this is where they'd use the hospital, definitely. When I used to get sick, she dragged me to Rovno.

And how old were you when your little brother was born? Or do you remember?

Yes, maybe just a few years. He died there because my mother complained the nurses neglected him. But I was maybe 3 years old. That's all. And then there were no other siblings.

So you became the only child.

I am the only child-- very pampered.

Yes, were you spoiled?

Yes, very spoiled too.

Were you in some way glad to be the only child?

Miserable.

You were miserable?

Miserable. I used to cry and tell my parents, I would say, Mom, go ahead and eat a lot of food and get fat, so you will have me a brother or a sister. I assumed by being fat, this is how you give birth the children. And I used to go away from the house, run away way where there would be other children, and I envied my friends who would say, guess what, my sister does broke my this, or my sister did this to me. And I thought to myself, gee, I wish I could say I had a brother or a sister who I could share something with. But my cousins were very close to me. We lived almost in the same house, like my surrogate brother. But no, I did not like the idea.

And what did your mother say? Did she say anything to you when you said you wanted to have a brother or sister?

She couldn't.

She just couldn't?

She needed some kind of a special operations surgery. And I know a little bit of details. But anyhow she couldn't conceive unless she would have this procedure. And then the wars came, just one after another. They abandoned the idea.

So is there a point at which you were not miserable?

As far as being single?

Yeah.

No, from that point of view, I still carry now. Even when I tell my son who has only one little girl, and I said to him, I shouldn't be giving you advice, but you do a disservice to your child if you don't have a brother or sister. And that's where it stayed, of course. I think it's such a-- there's nothing can replace a sibling love, no matter how many good friends you have or something. The sitting around the table during the holiday, the sharing and leaning on them when you get older-- I don't have to tell you all the benefits of the [INAUDIBLE]. So I'm all for family.

So you miss it?

Oh yes, I missed it. Yeah, I missed it.

And tell me about your parents. Your father, what did he-- his name was Abraham?

Abraham, yeah.

And what does he do for a living?

We lived on a farm. On that farm there were three families. There was my grandfather, who had still grown children who were not married. There was an uncle, my father's brother, who had three children. And then my father. The three of them, the father and two sons, owned the property. They owned the mill. They owned also the-- what you could make from wool to make cloth. The peasants used to cut-- they sheered their lambs or something and bring it to us, and then by the time they left, they had it all converted to material, so they can make coats or something.

We also were involved in making some kind of a oil, I don't know-- from press it down. So there was a lot of enterprises on our-- plus we had our own cows and horses. And we grew our own vegetables and garden. And it was a big-- people used to come to us and spend the whole summer because they had all the luxuries of fresh air and lots of food. And I don't know if you're familiar with Poland or Europe. In Poland your health was defined by how fat you were. So when somebody came to visit us and was going back to Rovno, they would go on the scale and say, well, how many pounds did you gain? This was the measure of the success.

But basically we were in the business of producing flour and producing cloth from wool, making oil, and I'm trying to think of other things. And we were really self supporting because we had the vegetables. We had all this in here. And--

Where did people stay when people stayed for the summer? Was there little dormitories or something?

No, nothing like this. You stretch your house. You stretch your house. You put two people in one bed. We had a sofa. And then we made-- they would take me out of my bed and put me in my parents' bed. It never was any problem as far as space. It was never any problem. And we only had a room, bedroom, living room, and then the kitchen. There was supposed to be temporary quarters until they built something more. And of course the war came.

But we had people coming and staying-- they managed somehow. Also we had little couches they could put down-- pillows and something to sleep. They had fun. And they had--

Did you like it?

I loved it. I loved people. And I loved all my relatives. And we would go walking into the forest and collect berries and mushrooms. And all the gaiety, the singing-- Saturday after eating the big meal, we would sing songs. And they brought with them the city flavor of Rovno, which we in Malyns'k didn't have. They had their [INAUDIBLE] and we were just country people there until we left Malyns'k. So it's a very nice contrast and very educational. I loved them.

And what sort of songs did you sing?

We used to sing-- what you call it-- Hebrew songs, Yiddish, and Polish, of course, but mostly Yiddish. The ones would always-- and the next year in Jerusalem, Hebrew themed--

Was there a particular song you liked more than others?

No, each of them had its own character. And its own-- my-- but we would start singing songs and get up and make a whole ring, clap your hands, [HUMMING] something like that. Everybody could sing. My mother was singing very well. And she would stand up like this after a meal in front of everybody and sing a song, which was her specialty, [SINGING IN YIDDISH] I don't know the words anymore. But the story told, in this Yiddish, how we were burned with fire, and all this in here. And everybody applauded her. Everybody who wanted got up and sang a song. It was a make your own entertainment.

And you were a little kid, right?

I was a little kid.

And people treated you well?

My family-- of course, I was pampered. As I said, I was an only child. And I had bad tonsils. And in Poland they didn't know what tonsils even are. I used to be sick a lot because I used to get tonsillitis. So my neck-- my glands would swell. And my mother-- the only medicine we had was-- other medicine, we would take a compress. And my mother had her own remedy. She would take a towel and dip it in alcohol. Some would put garlic. I smelled with garlic a lot because this was the old cure to bring the temperature down.

And I sometimes missed a month and a half of school because I used to be so sick. And finally she took me to a bigger city, Lvov. And went to see a doctor-- ear, nose, and throat-- and he said, you know your daughter has bad tonsils? They're all inflamed. They have to go. They're so bad. Take her home and fatten her-- because she had to be fat to be healthy-- and then bring her back to Lvov. And we're going to take her tonsils out. And that's what happened. I came home, about a week, nothing with eating, and then they brought me back to Lvov. And the doctor took out my tonsils. And they said they were very inflamed.

Rovno, they didn't even know about tonsils. Tonsils was a modern disease. Everything they called in Polish, [POLISH]. It means-- I don't know how to translate. But the glands used to be smaller. And then it was an accepted thing that people had sore throats. And you just sweated it out.

And one thing that was very common in Europe, and then later on we used that in the partisans, cupping. You know what that is? You put banks they called it in Yiddish. It's those little glass cups. You lay down on your stomach. And on your back, they would take put it on your back. First they had to get rid of the air and then put them all over your back. And you lay for 10 minutes. And when they took them off, it left circles. And the dark of the circle, we used to say, that's where the disease was. But basically this was the old cure, banks].

Later on I learned how to do it when I was in the partisans. But it's all we could do is the banks and give the compresses and lots of tea and just sweat it out. And then when things were very bad, I could tell because my father would put in a tallis and stay by the window and start praying. Then I knew that probably my illness is going out of hand. But he always would go and start praying. When Daddy prayed, I knew I was very sick.

[LAUGHTER]

And your mother, her name was Fay?

Fay. My mother was just very protective of me. And I remember-- it's a strange thing-- in Poland you couldn't get fruit like oranges or anything, certainly not in Malyn'sk. So she used to bring them in from Rovno. They were very

expensive. And she kept it for me in the cabinet. And she didn't want the other children to see because we didn't have enough and didn't want them to be jealous. But she pampered me. And [INAUDIBLE] with the clothes. And she did such a point that I didn't how to wash my hair long. She was overprotective.

And of course I was cream of the-- best thing. She would say, my [? Reizele ?]. This is the Jewish word. And she would go to the teachers and talk about me. And yes, I was very protected and-- overprotective, let's put it this way.

You were close to both parents?

Yeah, but in a different way. My mother, I found this overwhelming, her constant worrying about my health because she didn't know I had bad tonsils. But I used to get so sick. So she would insist I should eat and eat and eat. And I found it overbearing. I just couldn't eat. I didn't like certain things. I would throw out the window something.

In a different way-- my father loved me, but it was in a different way. He wasn't so demonstrative, walking around. But he would also sing songs for me in a different way. He was more calm. Men are this way, probably, by nature. But they were in personality, very different. She was really too much. I was an only child. And she wanted me to be well and to live.

But this was a burden for you?

Very much.

[BOTH TALKING].

I used to run-- I was telling my daughter the other day, I used to run away from home, not to run away-- literally stay away-- but if any opportunity I could, I'd leave and go to play with my cousins because over there, they had more children. My aunts were not so strict about they eat or not. But if I was at home, every minute my mother was to do this, eat that, eat, eat, eat-- that's the secret of good health. And don't forget to put your shoes on. Don't forget to put your handkerchief on.

And she would dress me so heavy in the winter because we had to walk to school, so snow and all. And she would bundle me up with so many layers of clothes. By the time to school, I had to unwind everything in here. But everybody knew already that my mother was so protective of me and sympathized with her.

They sympathized with her, not with you?

They sympathized with her because she had to put up with a child who was sick so much, and an only child. With me? No. The better the mother is, the--

The better--

Yes. They didn't see anything wrong. But they're so protective. Even my teachers used to send me cards and say, remember, I am going on vacation. But when I come back, I wanted to see you a few pounds heavier. And that's from a teacher. That's the good wishes from a teacher. It's a different world.

It was a different world. Did you have lunches together or dinners together with your--

Lots.

Lots?

I mean, with the relatives?

With your father and mother, or then with relatives? I mean--

Yes.

You did both?

Yes, we did a lot. My father, because he worked right there on the property, he used to come for his meals. And my mother would-- the table always was set with a tablecloth. And we always had the meals together. Or I would eat a long lunch because he was busy. But Saturday was beautiful because nobody worked. And everybody was going to shul. And after they came back from shul, there was the samovar sitting the middle of the table prepared already. And my mother would ask somebody-- some gentle person to light the light under the samovar.

And then everybody would sit around the table. And she baked a lot of cakes and goodies. And people from other Jewish families would come because they knew this is where we would have first our meal, but then sit and sing songs and that here, or take a walk. That's the place to go. And mom loved-- and she was a wonderful cook. No recipes, nothing, but a wonderful cook.

Was she?

Yes.

[LAUGHTER]

And so you enjoyed those dinners a lot?

Oh yeah, I loved the people. I've always loved-- in fact, we used to be jealous as children. And we used to say, oh we had today two people for dinner. How many did you have? To have guests--

Really? This was a big--

--was an honor.

Really?

And everybody who didn't know were-- they would pass through Malyns'k on the way to somewhere else. They didn't know where to sleep. They would come to us or to my uncle, till somebody would put them up to sleep and feed them until they would go on their house. My mother used to say, I have rubber pots and pans. They can stretch as many people as they are. And it was no problem. We always had to guests. It was an honor to have a guest at your table.

So did you feel poor or wealthy or neither?

No, in comparison with the people in Malyns'k, we were considered well-to-do. It depends on whose standards because we were self supporting. We had food and all this-- and never were hungry. But we were not on the-- like in America we say, wealthy. If you had your own-- we had our own horses, and we could ride around in the-- and cows and all this. We're self-sufficient. So we were considered, yes, well-to-do.

Within that context?

Within that context, yes, because the others were-- either they were-- one was a seamstress, and this was a shnayder. And this was a shoemaker-- they were more working according to their specialty. But they didn't own that property and live on such a scale.

Did you work at the farm at all? Did you help with the animals or help in some of these businesses?

My mother would give me sometimes crumbs, and she says, don't to go and spread it in front of the house for the

chicken. And I like to help in the garden. We grew our own strawberries and our corn. And my mother would say, you want to go ahead and pick some and bring it back? I didn't have so-called chores. But I would go there and tend to the yard. Just do things if Mom ask me something to do. And that's about it. I didn't go near the cows or anything, just around the--

Did you like the animals?

Yeah, I loved them. I used to observe them. We had animals in the house, like dogs and cats. But yes, I-- observing them, so certain personalities. I would see one, and I knew if I'm going to bring them some food, that chicken or the rooster is going to chase everybody away. And he's going to take the food from them. Then I used to get a kick out of those things, yeah.

[LAUGHS]

It was fun.

You were part of a religious household, I gather?

Oh, yes. It was orthodox.

It was orthodox?

Oh, yeah.

Not just traditional, but real--

Real orthodox. I remember we had a mezuzah on the door. And we observed all the holidays. And my mother kept kashrut. And if she wanted to have a chicken, we had to go to the shochet. You know what it is, right? It's the--

Person who--

--who cuts, yeah. It kills the chicken according to the Jewish law. But yes, we definitely had separate dishes and all. And my mother was very strict about-- in fact she wanted to engrain this into us-- into me when I came to this country and I was married, to carry on. But this is America. Now things a little bit different. But yes, she was very law abiding in the religious way.

Did you go to school regularly?

Yeah.

Did you go every week?

I went to what you would call here elementary school. And we started school in Poland at the age of 7. And then I had-- all the Jewish children were getting instruction in Hebrew and in Jewish history. We had a teacher who used to come after classes when we came home, he would come to the house and teach us Hebrew, which we resented-- the Jewish children resented because why do I have to sit home? And all the other kids are playing. We just came from school and all. But nevertheless this was part of our Jewish education and Hebrew too.

And otherwise we played-- Jewish children tended to be together. Although I had a very good friend, Catholic, and she would come over and play with me too. But there was never a lack of fun. There was always something to do. And people coming passing through, happened to be in the neighborhood or something. And as I said, I had cousins my age. My cousin is still alive, and he lives in Israel in Tel Aviv. He was my surrogate brother, my protector. And sometimes mischievous, but anyhow, this is my only I could call brother-- so-called.

Were there particular games that you liked, that you played?

That I played?

Yeah.

Yeah, we had something-- the rope, jumping. Everybody did the rope. And then we hit something on the ground, like squares.

Hopscotch?

Maybe this is called hopscotch here. We would jump around. And hide-and-peek, of course. And what else did we do? These are the most common ones, hide-and-peek and the--

So most of your friends were Jewish?

So it was a mixture. But the closest ones were Jewish. I don't know, not by choice, but we have something that we could share. We also could compare experiences. If somebody beat you up on the way to school, and did somebody call you *Á»yd*? *Á»yd* means Jew. So we had experiences that we could share, and saying so-and-so wasn't nice to this-- anti-Semitism was heavy in Poland. Poland was a very anti-Semitic country. And we as children sensed it too. So this was one reason why also the Jewish children tended to be together.

But I did have Gentile friends too. And they lived by. And they would come to us-- sometimes the parents. And we played-- all kinds of children and things. But the really closeness was with the Jewish children because we shared the same anxiety. We knew we were Jewish. We knew that we were singled out as Jews. They called us *Á»yd*. And I know that Sundays used to be very-- we used to be very apprehensive because the local people would get-- they would get the money by Sunday, get paid, so they would get drunk. And they would go in the street. They would see a Jew, especially the one with ear locks, the very Orthodox. They beat them up, cut the things. So fear of such things kept us Jewish children closer and warning, this and this. But we did have other [INAUDIBLE].

We're going to stop the tape.