

[TONE] Let me-- let me stick with the ghetto for just a little bit.

OK.

You were with the women for what, a couple of days, a few weeks? What?

Which women?

Your mother and your cousins before you went to your father in the ghetto.

Yes, it was just a few days.

Just a few days.

Yeah.

Did you eat bad-- was it terrible food?

I don't remember what we ate or who gave us, but I don't remember also being hungry. I don't know where the food came from. Or maybe we brought some with us.

So you weren't very hungry. Were you--

Those few days, no, we weren't. We were just settling into the ghetto. And I have a feeling we brought some with us from Malines because we still had our own food.

Right. When you went to be with your father--

Yeah.

--and your uncle--

And my uncle, yeah.

--what was the food like?

We had food there. God knows I don't know where it came from, whether the-- well, it was on a farm. We could always get something that's growing there, but I know, on the farm, you're not hungry because you always had potatoes and corn and some other things.

And it wasn't parceled out, you know, like you've seen a city ghetto. You have to stand with your part. You just sort of-- I'm just not clear about that, but we were not hungry there.

And where did you stay? Where did you sleep?

It was a barn, a big barn. And that's where all the men who worked were just people slept there in the barn. There was sort of some hay or something, whatever you call it. And then, in the morning, you go out and do your work.

We weren't there long enough to sort of settle there, but I felt so much more comfortable and relieved being in the open, not being kept in the ghetto with a wall around me, because, anything happens, we can run into the forest. And they don't want to chase after.

Were you the only girl?

I was an only child at that time.

The only child at that time.

Yeah, I'm the only child. And, no, the others all stayed in the ghetto. I don't know how my father pulled it or how I got to go to-- what do you call it? To go with him. It's just too far, but I was so grateful because, in comparison with city people, ghettos, you had the walls. You had streets.

And, if you go out of the ghetto, well, you'll find yourself-- even anybody can catch you and turn you in, whereas we were fortunate in our ghettos. In our area, there were those forests, and you could hide. And we became so skillful at it. You could sometimes cover your head with branches or something. So I felt very good, but, as I said, this didn't last long because then the--

It was only a few months.

--execution. Very little. I cannot even tell you dates, but I don't know, the most, two months. I just couldn't.

Now, when you joined the partisan group, did they know that the family was Jewish?

Oh, yeah.

They did?

There were so many Jews hiding in the forest that we told them right away that-- I mean, they were prepared anyhow that we ran away from the ghetto. And this is why we came to ask for shelter with them. So they knew it.

And did they take the family because your father had a rifle do you think?

Because we were-- yes, we were sort of-- because we were not helpless people. My father-- they could always use somebody else who has a weapon if you have to shoot. And my mother could cook. She actually cooked for Medvedev and all the big shots. She would cook, and then there used to be a man who would come later, an officer, and taste the food to make sure it wasn't-- this is part of their ritual-- and then eat.

So she was needed there too. And I made myself needed to. They weren't going to break up the family. So we were not a burden to them.

But your uncle was not taken in.

They wouldn't take him. And they wouldn't-- he kept coming back to them and begging them. Would you take us in? I don't know why. They said, if you don't stop coming, we were going to shoot you-- You never know how they thought. They didn't take people just like that. It's what's good for them.

There was a family by the name of-- I told you, the Dr. Martin, his wife, and then two small children, maybe a year and three-years-old or something. And they took them in because he was useful to them, a doctor. And then the children started crying very often. They were hungry and all. And they threw them out.

And, the doctor and the family, they started walking with the children. Where will he go? He goes, and he sees far away there. That's where the Germans are standing. So, if he leaves, he knows he's just walking into their trap.

So he turned around and went back to the partisans. And he told them, look, if you don't want to keep me, you might as well shoot me because, if I go straight to the Germans, they will shoot me. So they felt sorry for him, and they took them in, the whole family, because he was very-- they only had one doctor, the one who came in from Moscow. And he certainly knew more I think than this other guy. So they took him in because they felt sorry.

They were kind, but I don't know why. Maybe taking in my uncle meant five people. What are they going to do with three children? And you never can explain their reasoning, but, later on, they were taking more people, but they were just beginning this--

They were just starting.

--detachment, just not long ago. They're just getting established and didn't want any extra-- what do you call it-- baggage or something to drag. I don't know. But they refused to take him. And they threatened him. If you don't stop coming and complaining that you want to be taken in, we tell you we won't take you. He says that we'll shoot you.

Life was more than-- you had to be careful what you said. And if I may tell you the story about how they were very suspicious of outsiders because they never knew if somebody comes around and wants to sniff around and then turn us in. Or, one time, they did find out that one of the people from the local population-- I think they took him in maybe to work. Anyhow, he turned out to be a traitor.

And, when they found out, they took him in the middle of that forest, the square, and they hung him in front of everybody as a deterrent so that, if anybody ever attempted to go against or tell on us or turn us in, this is what's going to happen. And I remember seeing this man. In fact, they didn't want children to see this, but I said, no, he was a traitor. I want to see how a traitor-- you know, it was patriotism. And I wanted to see. And I saw this man. They hung him in front of everybody to serve--

And you saw the whole thing?

Yeah, I saw him, yes, because I was so full-- we were so full of hate of the Nazis or those people, even local, who used to turn us in or kill us or something that, to see one less-- and this sort of gave us satisfaction and hope that maybe the others will be put away some way. But this is a deterrent. They had to be suspicious of everybody.

Did that bother you, seeing that man killed? Or did it--

I wouldn't want to see it here, but not at that time. It depends in which context you see it. If it's a traitor and if he went against the motherland and if he wanted to kill us, why should we? It's like taking a Nazi and killing.

I would not want-- as a matter of fact, after the war was over, they apprehended a lot of those traitors. And, in Rivne, in an open place, they used to hang people. I saw people hanging. I don't know where they hung, but they were hanging for days in an open place those who collaborated with the Nazis. So they had to be very cautious.

But life was not-- they didn't look at people so much at them as it is going to help our cause because Medvedev came there, parachuted down over wherever he came from, with a special assignment. He came, and he brought Kuznetsov with him. And they had a special assignment that they will go to do away with this-- I don't know the German title, Ober something, Koch, K-O-C-H-- he was in charge of the whole Ukraine-- and to try to get close to him and do away.

Kuznetsov spoke fluent German. He knew it still from Russia. He lived somewhere in this colony. He volunteered to come to the partisans. He looked, what you call it, German with blond hair and blue eyes.

And I only saw him once. We were-- maybe I told you that we were forewarned there's going to be a German officer coming in here. Don't get scared, or don't kill him because this is one of ours, just dressed.

And he was so cheerful, very self-assured with this setting. And he was humming a song. He was going to meet, apparently, with Medvedev. This is the only time I saw him.

The rest, what I know is from people who were there. And he did quite a job, but that's a story all by itself how this man-- he died when he was in his 30s. That's how young he was. And so--

Did you see Medvedev?

Oh, yeah.

You did?

Yeah, I think policy was I didn't go sit with him, but I knew, occasional, when he crossed the grounds because, the way the camp was set up, in the center was the-- what do you call it? They called it the [GERMAN] where all the people who were running with Medvedev and all his assistants who were planning all. Then, around them, was another circle with little huts like of people. So he stood-- he stayed with his own people, I mean, those who came and gave him reports and all.

And we had there a Ukrainian family who was completely devoted to us. The sons didn't have to be afraid to commingle with the population because they looked like they lived there, but they used to bring reports back and forth and go to Rivne where Kuznetsov lived and bring information. Don't go here. Don't go there. We got this in here.

An interesting thing, I just found out not long ago that, when Kuznetsov just came there, he met Koch. They sit around the table. They sat around the table, and he said he could-- it would have been so easy to kill him, but he says they were watched so closely that, if he would just put his hand in the pocket-- he did have a gun with him. But, if he put his hand in the pocket or even take out the handkerchief, he would have been shot immediately.

So he knew that, even though he was pals with Koch, he'll never be able to kill him like when he was very guarded very much. So he still kept an eye on him, hoping some other ways to kill him. They had a lot of people who collaborated with the Russians, with the partisans, but they lived among the population. So nobody knew that they were and bring reports and all. And they were in Rivne, but he's a historic figure in Russia, both of them, heroes of the Soviet Union and all this stuff like that.

Did your father go on missions against the Nazis-- He did.

--with his rifle?

He did, but I don't know what. I know he used to go when they went to look for food, to come to peasants homes and say give us food. And, if they wouldn't, that's what my father said. If they refused to give food, they would say, well, we're going to set your roof on fire.

So I knew he used to go on this. Maybe he went also to go to derail trains. They would derail trains, but he never went to Rivne or any of this where his face would be, right away, recognized as a Jew. He was just one of many, but he helped them. He stood maybe guard too. I don't know.

But the idea was, if you take a Jewish person and put him back into the population, they'll catch him right away. They'll right away tell this. And so he didn't go out from much. And, if he went, he went with a group by the cover of the night. They used to derail trains or something.

Did you live with your mother and father? I mean, or were you all outdoors?

No, no, we a hut. I have the book downstairs. I'll show it to you. And then I slept with my mother and some other women. My father slept where the men were because they had to be ready whenever you have to go.

And, yeah, I slept next to my mom. And I found out that we had the fire in the middle, and we slept with our legs towards the fire and the head there. But, sometimes, it would be so cold that people's heads would-- hair would freeze. But we didn't mind it.

Also, I should say that life in the partisans wasn't all sad, and it wasn't all like a funeral or something. There were joyful times when they would sit around the fire, and somebody would play the accordion. And we would sing.

This doctor from Moscow, [PERSONAL NAME], by profession, he was an actor. So, when everything was quiet, he would come stay by the fire and cite poetry. He was a very handsome man, and we would sing. So it wasn't all the time a feeling like of death is going to-- is imminent or something. And we made the most of it.

And, also, of course, they had contact with Moscow. And Moscow could tell them where the front was. They didn't come and tell us, but they knew exactly where the front was. And they had to do what Moscow told them, take the order, which is different from any partisan groups who were formed by themselves.

They got together themselves, and they didn't have any other assignment. They just kill, kill the Nazis. And ours was very special. The main thing for them was just to kill the guy Koch, the head of the Ukraine, and some of his helpers too.

Did they ever do it?

No, Kuznetsov could not do it. He saw it was impossible. It was guarded too much. He was killed later, but he was able to do away with some of his helpers, assistants or something.

He was saw-- he blended in so well with them that he used to drink together and party together. And never, never did anybody suspect that he was a spy until later on, until later on. And all assignments he did successfully, but then he would always sit in a car dressed in his uniform, and the German had a chauffeur and a lot of chutzpah and all and drink with them and all.

He had a girlfriend. She was a Russian, sure. And she lived somewhere. I don't know with him or somewhere along the way. But she was there.

Towards the end, when they found out things are going on, they did arrest her. And the Gestapo took her, and she told his story. But so they already had an eye on him, but they couldn't apprehend him because the front was moving towards Lviv, west, west, west.

But it is sad how he died. He had a lot of chutzpah. Life didn't mean anything to him. All of us were very patriotic, and we all had the same slogan. In Russian, [RUSSIAN SPEECH] means for the motherland. So he didn't kill Koch, but Koch did die by somebody else. And you want me to talk some more of the partisans?

Yes.

Oh, please.

Sure, absolutely.

OK, yeah, well, anyhow, as far as life concerned in the group, it was, more or less as possible, structured. Everybody knew, more or less, what he had to do. And they used to change sometimes. They had to move the camp around if they knew that somebody might have seen us there. And they would start taking in more people later on.

And the news-- planes would come, periodically, and land. And that's a story itself. They would find an opening somewhere in the forest, enough for a plane to land. And they would put fire-- what do you call it-- fires, three fires like in the corner, in the open. So, if a plane comes, and he'll be looking for a space where there's three fires, it means this is the landing place.

And he had to come by the cover of the night, land there. It was a transport plane of course. It wasn't a passenger plane and bring whatever may be news or maybe medicine, something, and take the wounded people.

And, in one of those trips, my parents asked Medvedev or whoever was there, please, let my daughter go to Moscow too. Let's at least know that one from my family survives. So there were some other children he was sending off in a

family. So he agreed to let me-- to let go. And, this other family, the woman says I will take care of her. I'll be her surrogate mother.

So we got on the plane and sitting. And, because it was not seats, it was just like benches. And then we see in the corner a bunch of they had the geese and chicken and-- what do you call it-- sheep or something because there was hunger in Moscow.

And they were coming here from the Ukraine, which was rich and --. So they [INAUDIBLE] the whole thing. Yeah, yeah, yeah, you don't need the ducks. And [INAUDIBLE] God, how are we going to fly?

I don't know how they calmed him down, but they had to be practical. They had to leave by the cover of the night because the front was still around Stalingrad. When we flew in the dark, very, very high, you could see, sometimes, bullets flying. But, if you looked down, you could see the front, and it was like a snake with lights. And this is where the front was at that time.

It was very cold. I remember because we had to fly very high so they wouldn't spot us. And we flew through the night. I remember, in the morning, we were in Moscow. And it's amazing. Now that I think, they didn't need any gas getting something, because from let's say the Rivne area until Moscow--

It's far.

--it's quite a-- but they were so skilled and maybe a little drunk too, the pilots. Who knows? You know, the geese and the ducks and all the things and the children, nobody thought [INAUDIBLE], gee, my goodness we were so happy to get out of the Ukraine and go into Moscow into maybe on safe territory.

So were you concerned that your mother had asked that you be taken away? I mean, were you upset by that?

No.

You weren't?

No, we had, as I told you, an agreement. You save yourself. And, if my parents could arrange for me to go and save myself, they didn't know what was going to happen to them. This whole group detachment, the Germans could have maybe come along and threw bombs.

She could have been killed. Her life was not safe. And, even the partisans too, it could change very quickly. But, at least, she felt that I am going so-called on safe territory.

The Germans were repulsed from Moscow maybe I don't know how many kilometers there. And, at least, I will survive. So this is why everybody was glad to send the children to Moscow.

So you had been in the partisan group for what, about a year?

I was about a year. We went into the forest ourselves, before the partisans, in 1942. This is when the order came out to kill the Jews. And we met the partisans like maybe in the fall of '42.

'42.

And I left for Moscow in 1943. And I thought it was going to be great because I don't have any more Nazis to worry about or anything. It was a nightmarish year.

Why?

Because, first of all, I was never without my parents. And I was very lonely. I was only about 13 or 14. I didn't know.

And there was nobody I knew in Moscow. And I only told them. I said I want to go to school, but I also would like to work to help the country, blah, blah, and all this propaganda.

So they put me and another girl who came with me into a technical school where I worked for about eight hours a day at this factory on a lathe. It was like a cup, and I had to make it a certain diameter, you know? And then somebody else would take it and put grooves on it. And then they would take this and screw it into the bomb, you know? So they put me in there.

And, also, during the day, when we came back, we would have like four hours of lessons. The year was very-- I was hungry. We were so hungry. There was no food. It was cold, and we didn't have the right clothes for Russia. And I think the loneliness was even bigger than anything.

I took sick because of the lack of food. I had rashes on my body. I had a lump in my breast, and I had other things. And they did treat me some, but there were no antibiotics there yet, you know? There was not penicillin, something like this.

And I didn't even know if my parents were still alive. You couldn't send letters to the partisans to the forest. Occasionally, somebody would come back and say, yeah, we saw your mother or something.

And the worst thing of all that I remember standing once at a railroad station-- the railroad stations, like in where I lived, had like an overpass for pedestrians to go through from one side to the other. And I stood there one day, and I said, gee, God. I said I wish I had the strength to just throw myself off that bridge because life has no meaning to me because I didn't know if I'll ever see my parents.

And the most important is to say, as soon as I finished that class, they're going to make us work 12 hours a day. And how can you work 12? I knew that, physically, I couldn't. So life had no meaning.

So, in this respect, being in the partisans was easier for me because my parents protected me, the partisans. And I had food or something, whereas I came to Moscow. Maybe I didn't see the Nazis anymore, but it was grueling.

In Russia, everybody-- kids were taken out of school and put to work in factories and work everything. And all able men were put in the army to fight. And you can see, sometimes, pictures of little kids standing, working the lathes and some stuff like that.

But there was no hope. We knew that the war was still going on. The Germans were still-- the Russians never even got into Germany yet. And we didn't know whether, one day, they could turn around and push back.

But, for me, I was so homesick for my parents, nothing else. Even being hungry, I used to say to myself-- I was about 14. I'd say, mama. I said, you know, if ever we get together again, I promise I'm going to be good. And I promise I'm going to eat everything that you make for me, and I'll never throw it out. And I want to be with mama again. And I hope God to unite us.

And so this is the work was hard. The climate was very hard and the despair. There was no future to look forward to. We didn't know what's going to happen, if my parents will survive, and when the war would end.

And then this was the fall of 1943. And then, in this spring of 1944, I remember working in the factory, working my lathe. And the supervisor says to me, Rosa, come here. I want to see you. Oh no, somebody wants to talk to you, he says, the supervisor or something. Come into the room.

So I come down there. And who sits there? My mama. My mama because, at that time, Rivne was already liberated. And she would turn the world around to come and fetch her daughter. So they let her come on a military train to Moscow. And she came there to the factory, but they didn't want me preparing for me to come and see her.

So they said somebody wants to see you. And I walk in, and there is my mother sitting. I had no warning that she was liberated and come. Oh, well, of course, we're overjoyed. And all the supervisors were very touched at the reunion.

And my mother said she was very proud. They had a lot of respect for her because she just was a partisan, and she was fighting the Nazis. But they would not let me go home with her unless she would promise that, when I come back to Rivne, I will continue working at the factory because they spent all the training on me. And I should continue with my work and all this like this and here.

Of course, she says yes, yes, but we didn't. When I came there, we don't have factories. But the basic thing is that they figured they invested in me. They trained me. It was a miracle that I made it that winter to--

We're going to have to stop for a moment because we have to change the tape. I'm sorry to interrupt you.

No, no, no.