

This is an interview for the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. We are interviewing Rhoda Kuflik. Name at birth was Razhenka Husen.

Right. Razhenka.

My name is Esther Finder. Today is July 11, 1997. And this interview is going to be a combination of Mrs. Kuflik's story of survival, and also it's going to supplement a book that we have in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum library entitled The Kitever Yizkor Book, which was written by your father, Isaak Husen.

Husen, yes. And it was published in 1958. This is tape 1, side A. Can you tell me, what is your name?

My name is Rhoda Kuflik. And my maiden name is Husen.

When were you born?

I was born October 1937.

And where were you born?

I was born in Kitev, it was called, or Kutuy as it's spelled-- K-U-T-Y-- on the maps.

Can you tell me a little bit about the town?

Yes, I can. Kutuy is located in the southeastern part of Poland, now belongs to the Ukraine. And it's located near the Romanian border. There's a river called the Cheremosh in Kutuy that divides Kutuy from Romania. To tell you a little bit about the town, Kutuy was a resort area. It had lovely gardens, it had many flowering valleys, mountains.

Many people used to come there on vacation. And many things started there too. The first Boy Scouts in Poland started in Kutuy. They had many artists in Kutuy. It was a very nice place to grow up.

Can you tell me a little bit about the makeup of the population? Were there many Jews in the town?

Yes. From what my dad wrote in the book, there were about 2,500 Jews living there, many professional people. That's what the book states. I would like to, if I may before I go on with Kutuy, tell you my reasons for the tape, if I can.

I wanted to make this tape because at the moment, the book is written in Yiddish. And I'm planning to have it translated into English. But before that happens, I thought I would make this tape, because I would like people to understand a little bit about this book and what this book is about. And also I thought I would tell you a little bit about my dad, because he dedicated a great part of his life to writing this book.

He spent five years throughout the war keeping a diary. And in this diary, he kept all the information about what happened to the people in town-- not just Kutuy, but the surrounding towns as well-- many, many Polish towns. And Kutuy was a typical town in Poland, and what happened there happened to many of the other towns.

He kept this diary for, as I said, five years. And then in 1958, he wrote the book. That was 16 years after the war. Now, I think you have to understand his reasons for wanting to write the book as well. He felt it was his mission to write this book, to tell this story. He felt that he just wanted people to know about it.

He could not understand, he didn't believe that the democratic world did not know what was going on in Poland. And many, many of the Jews in Poland felt the same way. And he felt he wanted to tell the story so that people would know what happened. They could not understand how the democratic world would not do something about this if they had known that people were being murdered for no reason at all by the Germans and the Ukrainians.

He also felt that if he kept this diary, that after the war was over, and if he lived to see it, he wanted to see that these people were brought before a world tribunal and held responsible for the atrocities that they committed. And so that was his mission. And I think it almost kept him alive, because he was constantly writing.

He knew a lot of people in the area in Kutu. He had a lumber yard-- a huge lumber yard in the area. And he was friends with many people, Gentiles as well. And they brought him information about all the things that were going on and happening in Kutu as well as in some of the surrounding areas, which for a lot of people, it was difficult to find out. Because when things were happening in these areas, the Germans would cut telephone lines, they would make it so people would not know what was going on. So in any event, I just wanted you to have a little bit of a background about my dad. As we go on, I'll tell you more.

You wanted to add something?

Yeah, I did. I just wanted to add that besides covering the Polish towns in the area, he also writes about the Hungarian people as well as Romania. So it's quite interesting to see how thoroughly he covered that particular area of Europe. And also, the first few chapters of the book talk about the Jewish community in Kutu.

And as I said, Kutu, you might think of it as a typical town, because it was. He describes the schools, and the houses of worship, and how the Jews made their livings there, how they celebrated their [NON-ENGLISH], their weddings and other occasions. It gives a full picture of Jewish life before World War II. And in Kutu, it was quite full. They were very active and did quite a lot of things.

Now, I guess I should go on now with what happened to Kutu. The Germans had divided Kutu, Poland, and divided it with the Russians, there was a treaty signed, and they divided it. And so the Russians were in Kutu. And then in World War II, the Germans decided, no treaty. They want Kutu and they want Poland.

So as we all know, they invaded Poland in 1939. They came into Kutu in 1941. That was June 21, 1941. And my dad wrote in the book that we woke up to the German bombing of the bridges and various other parts that the Russians had built there. And the next day, the Russian army started to leave Kutu. As soon as that happened, the Ukrainians that were Russian sympathizers became Nazi sympathizers.

They formed a police force in town, and they robbed Jewish homes. They just went robbing Jewish homes. They were very anti-Semitic, and they were willing partners in terminating the Jews. They did a great part of the killing in Poland. And in many instances, I believe that many Jews might have been alive if the Ukrainians didn't go looking for them, seeking them out, killing them themselves, and handing them over to the Nazis.

Now, when the Germans entered Kutu, as I said in 1941, they had the Jews form a Judenrat. The Judenrat was a group of Jews in town that were sort of the go-betweens between the Nazis and the Jews. Whenever the Germans needed something, they would go to the Judenrat and they would say, deliver this to us. And the Judenrat would go to the Jewish community and get it for them.

The Judenrat was ordered to hand out working cards to the Jews of Kutu. And they were told that as long as they do the work, which consisted of building up the bridges which the Germans bombed, working on the streets, doing cleaning up jobs, whatever. They were safe-- that's what they were told. And as my dad writes in the book, that was a false security.

The Germans also had a systematic plan in their destruction of the Jews-- systematic plan and destruction of the Jews in Poland as a whole. But I'll tell you about Kutu. Everybody from the age of 10 years had to wear on the left arm a white band with a star of David. And written in the star was the word, Jude, which is Jew. From 12:00 PM to 12:00 AM, they couldn't leave their home. If they were caught outside, they were shot.

They used to have motorcycles driving around town, they saw somebody, they would shoot them. My mother once walked out of the house, did not have the band on her arm, and lived. They didn't know that she was a Jew. Our house was located in an area where there were other Gentile homes around. And I believe since she didn't have that on her arm, she was spared.

Now, to get back to the rules, as I said, this armband they had to wear, they couldn't leave the house from 12:00 PM to 12:00 AM. They couldn't have any contact with Gentiles. They couldn't go shopping for food in the marketplace. And all their warm clothing like fur coats, wool items, or any other items of value they had to give to the Gestapo. The Ukrainian police enforced the laws, and anyone caught with these goods was immediately shot-- no questions asked, just shot.

Now, after all they had done this in the town-- after they had starved the people and the people suffered from cold because they didn't have any warm clothing, then they started to physically eliminate the Jews. That was the system they used in Kutu and also many other towns. The first actually incident that we heard happening in Kosov. I think it's spelled K-O-S-O-V. That was in October of 1941.

Do you have any idea how far that area is from your town?

It was about 10 miles from Kutu-- very close. What happened was a man came to town and said that he was on his way to Kosov. And he tried to make a phone call, and the lines were down. And that was an indication to him that something was going on there, because the Germans would always break down the line system so nobody would know what goes on when they were busy doing something in an area.

So he came to town, and he told us that he heard that the Germans were gathering all the Jews together there. And they were telling them to take little small packages along with them, and they were taking them away to concentration camps. Well, in our town of Kutu when we heard that, we thought they are coming for us next. We were all sitting and waiting for them to come and get us.

Had they come, they would have just taken us all away. We were starving in town, we were cold, we had enough, and if we could go someplace where we didn't know what to expect there, but we were ready to go. After a while, a few days later, we heard, no, there were killings in Kosov. They didn't take them away, but they were killing them.

Well, my dad decided he was going to go see for himself. So he went to a doctor and he got a note saying that his child was sick, and he had to go and get the doctor from Kosov to come to see his child. He got a wagon and a horse, and he drove to Kosov. When he got there, this is what he saw-- he saw homes that were demolished, broken windows and doors. He didn't see a living soul in town.

And in the middle of the town, he saw two mass graves. He saw a cousin that we had there. And she told him what happened. She told him that the Nazis gathered the Jews, shot them, and threw them into the graves. She told him they took small children by the hair, and with the butt of the gun they cracked their skulls. Then they kicked them with their boots into the graves.

He tells of a story of how a young doctor that one of the Nazis knew and had been going to was told that he could live, and the Nazi wanted to let him go. He chose to die with his bride. He did not want to go. My dad gives the names and people that lived there and died there.

The remaining Jews of that town were taken to Kolomyia, where they were separated. The old ones were shot, the young ones were sent to work in labor camps, and the others were packed in wagons and taken to Belz. Many died in those wagons which were over-packed with people of lack of air and starvation. My dad says that if any people were left in town, they went crazy. Well, when my dad came back from Kosov, he felt he knew that what happened there was going to happen to us. And--

I want to interrupt with just a question. Do you know when your father started keeping his diary?

Yes. He kept it throughout the war. And he started when the Nazis came into Poland. And the first atrocity that happened in Kosov, he decided to write this down so that it would not be forgotten. And then he kept adding to it all along. So anyway, when dad came back from Kosov, they were very disturbed in Kutu, because they knew that things were going to happen to them too.

And I have to tell you-- at that time in Kutu, the people, they were really starving, they couldn't trade with the Polish peasants anything that they had. And a lot of the Ukrainians and Polish peasants, if they did trade before for some food, they did such a great deal of plundering in Kosov, they didn't even want to deal with any more people. So there were people starving-- literally starving-- five to six people were dying a day.

I remember as a small child walking on the street with my dad and seeing people sitting on the street half dead. They were begging for potato peels. They had absolutely nothing to eat. The weather was getting colder, and they couldn't even grow anything. They had nothing to eat.

So in any event, the Jews in Kutu became almost mystic. They didn't know what to do now, OK? What happened in Kosov, what should they do? They started believing in miracles. They thought that it's not going to happen to us. People came up with dreams-- they had some dreams and they spread rumors about these dreams, that in the midst of everything, a miracle is going to happen, and we were going to be saved.

They spread these miracle rumors, even the Gentiles in town were waiting to see if that day is going to come along, because that's how strong these people believe-- they just believe that way. But there were other people who didn't. They felt if God forsake us, why shouldn't he forsake Kutu? And so people started to think of other ways of hiding, and just if things were to happen in town, we had to have someplace to hide.

Now, I can tell you about our situation in hiding. We dug a hole in the ground in one of our rooms. It was by a wall where a closet was standing on this wall. You open the door from the closet, and you took out the shelf, and there was the opening, OK? There was like a drawer. You move the drawer out, and you opened it up, and you went through that drawer, which was flush to the ground, and you went down into this hole.

In the hole, which we dug deep, and at night we dug it so nobody would see us. We'd carry the earth out and get rid of it outdoors. We put a ladder going down. And we put a picture of water in there and food for two or three days. We also put a wooden bench down there that would seat 10 to 12 people. And during the day, we would time it to see how long it would take for us to get down there.

And we had one person look out the window all the time towards the road of Kolomyia, because that's where they would be coming from, the Nazis, to watch and be on guard just in case they came. And that is what we did to try and hide. Now, April 10, 1942-- Passover time-- first Akcja happened in Kutu. Akcja was like in the olden days used to call pogrom, but the Germans called it akcja. I don't know if the Germans called it, but that's what it was-- akcja.

From the Kosova road, four large cars with Gestapo and SS came from Kolomyia. They drove to the marketplace. They were shooting people on the way as they were driving. Now, as soon as the Gestapo was seen, the Ukrainians came out. And the Gestapo and the Ukrainians, they were throwing hand grenades at the houses in the ghetto area. The ghetto area was certain streets in Kutu where primarily Jews lived.

A sea of flames and smoke erupted from the entire area. You could hear screams from the houses for help. They caught some children, and they threw them into the flames. They molested the women before shooting them. People tried to jump from their burning rooftops and were shot by the Nazis.

950 people were murdered on this Passover of 1942. In our house, I remember my dad screamed, let's go, and we all started running. I don't know where I was, but I ran. And I ran into the closet, got down through that opening in the drawer, got down, we closed it. We stayed down there-- I don't know how long we stayed down there. But I heard a Jewish voice in the house say, [YIDDISH].

We knew we shouldn't come out. They were saying, come on out, they left already. But many times, they used to get Jewish people or people that spoke Jewish to say certain things like that for people to come out. So we stayed there longer. When we finally did come out, the pitcher of water we were drinking was totally mud, because the earth kept falling into it. It was like drinking dirt. But we couldn't care less-- we were alive and we came out.

That was after the akcja was over. My dad went and helped to bury the people. And there were mass graves in town, and that's where they buried the people. People went searching in the streets for bodies-- parents looking for their dead children. My dad said he saw a man wheeling his 16-year-old son, his dead body.

My dad said 16 years later when he wrote the book, he still was trembling when he remembered that day. He went and he tells about he saw three children. They were molded together by their blood all around them-- it was one bloody mess. They looked like one body. He helped to separate them and carry them out. He saw dead bodies of families he knew everywhere. He saw a man lying on the ground with his eyes open. He tried to close the man's eyes, and some Ukrainians were standing and laughing.

Now, before the first akcja, before it happened, some Jews got together and they were talking of what to do and how to survive. And they found out from some Polish peasants who worked on the black market, that in Czernowitz, Romania, which is about 80 miles from Kutu, there were 40,000 Jews living. They had to wear yellow stars of David on their lapel, but they could go out at certain times to shop for food. And they live in their own homes, and they led normal lives.

So based on this information, two days after the first akcja we decided that we were just going to leave. Well, I remember I left that night with my family-- my mother and my father. I don't know if I mentioned my mom's name. My mom's name is Yeta. And her maiden name was Liebergal. Well, her Jewish name is Rivka. Anyway, we left.

And I remember that night when we left, when we walked outside, I saw people standing on rooftops with white sheets, flames everywhere, and they were still trying to put the flames out. That was two days after that happened. Now, our house was not put to flame, because it was not in a primarily Jewish area. It was surrounded by Gentile homes. And that's why, really, it wasn't burning.

Were you an only child?

Yes. So we left for the Romanian border. We went at night, and we went to the border. My dad carried me on his back. When we came to the border, I remember in the distance the silhouette of German soldiers. The peasant who was taking us there, trying to help us get to the border, told my parents that we have to be separated for a while-- it would be safer than going together.

So he took me somewhere-- to his house, I think-- and I slept on his attic for a couple of hours. I must have been around four, five years old then. And then he woke me, and he took me-- it was still night-- and we walked to a train station. Now, the trains did not stop in Kutu, but it slowed down at that particular spot.

My mom and dad were waiting there. They said they thought they'd never see me alive, would never see me again. As the train was approaching, my dad grabbed me and held my mother with his other arm, and we jumped onto the slowly moving train. We got on the train, and as we jumped onto the train, a conductor came over.

He realized that we were trying to save ourselves and that we were Jews. And he took us, and he put us in his private area of the train. He said, sit here. He said, if we come to a station and they want to come through, the Germans, to search for passports, he said, just tell them you're taking your child to Czernowitz to the doctor, and I'll do the rest of the talking. This man was like an angel. He saved our lives.

Do you by any chance happen to know his name?

No. I wish I did. No. Now, when we got to Czernowitz, we did not have the passports that we needed there.

I'm going to ask you a couple of questions. And if you don't remember, that's fine, because I know you were quite young. What were you able to bring with you when you left?

We brought nothing-- nothing. My dad put on a jacket. That in itself was almost like a great miracle for us. Because what happened that night when we left-- as I said, it was two days after the akcja, and the Germans had gone through

our house. And so everything was upside down.

As a small child, I remember going into a closet, and looking down, and seeing a handful of pictures. I picked up those pictures, and I put it into the pocket of a jacket. That was the jacket my dad put on. And when we got to Czernowitz, he put his hand into the pocket, and he found all of our family pictures-- and some of those pictures are in the book that are of us, my mom and me, and of himself and my mother-- wedding pictures that he did not. But he has many, many of the pictures in this book of our families and themselves too.

Anyway, as I said, when we got to Romania, we did not have passports. And the way to Romania was perilous. Many people tried to cross the border. And if they were caught, they were returned to the Gestapo. And the Romanian send-off to Transnistria, which was their concentration camp. So many people were afraid to do that-- they didn't want to take the chance.

So if you got to Romania, you tried to get those papers. If you got the papers, you were safe. But even in Romania, they kept looking for the Jews. And if they found Jews that did not have the papers, they sent them back, as I said, to the Gestapo. So we had to hide in Romania, and we did.

When we first came over there, we went to a family that we knew there-- a Jewish family, name was Koerner. He was a dentist. And we stayed there for one or two days. Then we went to another place. His name was Benzion Stettner. And he kept us in his house during the day. And at night, he had a little courtyard-- we would go out and get a little bit of air. He really saved us, because we spent a good part of the time with him.

Then just before we got our papers, we ended up going to another Jewish family, Dora Klein. She lived in an apartment house, and she allowed us to stay in the attic, in the roof. There was an attic space. And we stayed there-- mom and dad and I, we slept there. We stayed there for a few days. And all of a sudden, she came and she got us down.

And she says, you can't stay in the roof anymore. You got to wait in my apartment, she said, because if the Germans come in now-- they are coming now, they're coming from house to house-- if they come in here and they find you, they'll know that I hid you, and you cannot stay up there anymore. I remember my mother tried to walk into the kitchen to get something, she says, don't hide. Stay in the living room. You can't go there.

Well, another miracle-- they stopped at her house. They did not come upstairs. And so we were saved, and eventually got the papers that we needed. Now, I have some memories of Romania. I remember we had an apartment-- we lived in this apartment there. And I remember sitting on the windowsill and looking out. And across the street, there was a [? kazerne ?], which is like a canteen for Germans.

And this Nazi was walking on the street, and a Jew came straight on to him. And he went over to the Jew, and he slapped him hard in the face for no reason at all. He said to him, you're not wearing the star, which they were supposed to wear-- that yellow star on their lapel. The man had it on, the man didn't say anything. The German just laughed and went on.

I was sitting on the window, I got so scared. I wiped the window with my hands so that nothing would be left on that window of my breath. It was horrible. But in Czernowitz in Romania, my dad, because he was well-known in Kutu, knew some peasants who helped to bring other people across.

They brought a cousin of ours, her name is Sally. Sally came and stayed with us. We raised her in our home. Sally tried to cross the border with her parents. Her parents were religious, and so they put Sally as a child on the train. It was Saturday. They didn't want to go Saturday. They went Sunday. Sunday, lots of Germans were on that train. They never followed. She never saw her parents again.

I have to interrupt you so I can change the tape. One moment. We're interviewing Rhoda Kuflik, this is tape 1, side B. And you were telling me about how other people were managing their escape. And you had told me about your cousin and what had happened to her parents.

Right. Well, my dad wrote letters back to Kutty. And he was telling them to try to come, to try and save themselves and come. But again, those false working cars that the Judenrat gave out to them, they felt for the moment they were safe. And they felt when the time came, they would try to escape. But like my dad said in the book, only the Gestapo knew when that moment would be.

And when they tried, it was too late. But dad did manage to get out quite a few people from Kutty. He got out his mother, who was already standing on a death march. He sent somebody and he got her. I don't know how he did it, but he did. He saved her. He saved his sister. He saved his sister's son. The son, whose name is Haum Drukman, is in Israel now. He's the head of the Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

And he was also a member of the parliament. One time I remember this boy that came to our house, and he stood up in our apartment there in Czernowitz, raised his hand, and sang, Hitler [NON-ENGLISH] the German anthem. He was a Jewish boy that was caught at the border with his parents and raised by the Nazis. He didn't know he was Jewish.

Somehow, people discovered it, and dad was able to save him and send him, I think, to Israel-- I think. I was young and I'm not sure, but I know he saved him, because they took him from my house and they sent him somewhere. So anyway, this is what was going on in Czernowitz. I'll go back to Kutty now so I can tell you what was happening in Kutty while we were in Czernowitz.

Maybe you can continue with what happened to you.

OK.

And let's do that, and then we can go back and pick up the book.

OK. OK.

I know you were young, and you have pieces of memory. But can you think of other events or situations from that time period-- anything else stand out in your mind?

Yeah, no, Czernowitz was interesting too-- interesting, that's not the word, but very poignant memories. We were there, and the war ended there. So all of a sudden, one day the Germans were running from Czernowitz. They left Czernowitz. There was panic-- imagine all the Germans, they overnight were gone.

People left their apartments and walked on the streets. There were empty houses. People walked into houses and occupied houses. We did too. Now, there were no clothings or items of any kind in the houses, but they were furnished. People just took over a house and lived there. And I remember in Czernowitz, I saw the Germans being brought into town as prisoners by the Russians.

And as they were marching, I cannot describe the feeling to see them being taken as prisoners. And I remember one of the Russians yelling to me, because I was standing there sort of frightened, and he was saying, don't cry anymore. It's all over. Now they are going to be crying. And we stayed in Czernowitz for a while.

I wanted to ask you to think back. And even though you were quite young, do you remember your parents explaining things to you or putting restrictions on your behavior because of the situation of the times?

Well, I remember when we first got to-- first of all, I forgot to mention, now that you remind me, when we crossed the border to go to Czernowitz, my dad was carrying me on his back, and I fell into the Cheremosh. We had to cross that river as well when we crossed the border, we crossed the river, which I forgot to tell you. Oh, god.

And I fell. And my mother says, I didn't make a sound. They didn't have to tell me. You just knew. You were so scared most of the time, you just didn't make a sound. And then when I came to Czernowitz, I remember when we first got to the first place, which was Koerner's house, that dentist, I spoke up, and somebody in the house said to me, you can't talk so loud here.

I wasn't used to hearing my own voice. Yes, I knew I had to keep quiet. I just knew. You saw such things happening all the time, it was just very scary. I remember in Kutu, I was sitting once by the window. And I looked outside, and my mother's brother was walking on the street. And a priest came in his direction. And that was another thing-- although I don't know, it doesn't seem to be one of the written rules.

But a Jew could not walk on the same side of the street or be on the street when a Gentile came across him. And I remember my uncle quickly running off the street and sort of slouching down so he would not be in the way of the priest that was walking across. So there were things that really you knew in your heart you just had to keep quiet and suffer through. And it's almost like unspoken. Nobody had to tell you to be afraid or be quiet. You just knew you had to do it.

While you're waiting to get the false papers, were there instructions given to you and what you could or could not say to people?

You mean now in Czernowitz? I just remember hiding with my parents, like I said, in these various places, and being in the apartment. I didn't go out. It's not like I went out on the street or I went anywhere. You just had to stay inside and do whatever you had to do quietly. It was not a normal life for me.

My parents never tried to scare me in terms of telling me stories. I saw my mother crying when they couldn't save her younger brother, instead of him following like the others out of Kutu when my dad tried to save them. And she found out that he was going to an area where there's a concentration camp, and he's going to his death. I saw the tears, I saw the heartaches. But that was part of my life.

You said you were in hiding underground for a couple of days. What did you do during those couple of days?

You mean when we hid in Kutu? We did nothing. It's so hard to believe-- we sat on that wooden bench and just listened for noises. That's all I can tell you I remember. I don't know if it was several days. It might have been a one-day thing, because the akcja happened, and then I heard those people screaming, come on out, it's OK. It could have been a day and a half, could have been two days-- I don't think it was more than that.

Is there anything else that has come to mind or that you'd like to mention about the time that the Germans came to your town, and the time that you were liberated?

Well, my memories-- basically, as I said, I was very small. And the things that stand out in my mind is the night when we left and the flames all over. I remember when I came out from our hiding place and I went to my next door neighbor, I was very friendly with the little girl next door. She was my age. And they came out from their bunkers wherever they were hiding.

And she seemed half-dressed. She seemed terrible-- like you never see yourself, but you see somebody else. And I remember hearing stories when we were in Czernowitz that she was taken away to a concentration camp, and that she jumped from a moving train, and that she died.

My cousin Sally told me where they were hiding. Their house was in not the ghetto area, but they were primarily living in the Jewish area with all the other Jewish homes. So they hid in a stove. They hid under the stove in the ground. The stove was standing on that spot. And the air they breathed was through the stove.

And she said when she came out, all she heard was the screaming and wailing of sounds, because they lived right there. I didn't hear that because our house, like I said, was surrounded by some Gentile homes. So at least I was spared that. Oh, I didn't tell you-- for air, we had a hole in the wall from underneath where we were hiding. And that's how we breathed. that's how we did that too. That's what stands out in my mind.

How was the hole concealed?

Dad writes in the book-- I think it was covered by something, I'm not sure. It's hard to make out the Jewish expression



he used in the book. But I know it was a hole that was covered by something, and it was in the wall. You know what it is? It's a hole in the wall, but I think it went towards the outside. You know what I mean? It wasn't inside the house. It was a hole going through the wall outside. That's what it was. Yeah.

Meanwhile, back in your hometown, things were still continuing to develop. And your father, was he able to maintain contact with the people in the town?

Yes, he did. Again, like I said, my dad, because he was so well-known in town, he had peasants from the town. They brought all the information all the time. He knew exact dates, he knew the names of the people that were killed. He knew how they were killed. He knew exactly what was happening-- everything.

And so he kept all this information in his diary, as I said. And he writes that on April the 11th-- that was after the akcja that we left-- we were gone. The Germans came out with an order that all the Jews from Kutu, in 24 hours, they had to leave to Kolomyia to the ghetto.

OK, you know what? I'm just looking at my dad's dates here in the book. And the order that the Gestapo came out with that the Jews had to go to Kolomyia 24 hours from town came out on April the 11th. And we left a day later, because on the 11th, that was the next day after the akcja, that's when my dad helped bury all the bodies and everything.

So must have been a day later, and we left on the 12th, I would imagine. That's when it happened, yeah. Anyway, they didn't go through with that order, because there were so many bodies to be still cleaned up. And there were so many things to make in order in Kutu, they needed the Jews for the work. So they postponed it. They postponed it for several months.

Now, the only people that were allowed to remain in Kutu were the ones that got working cards after that-- people who they needed for the work-- for the cleanup and who could do all this work. So what happened now is the business with the working cards. The Judenrat had the power to give people these working cards. Some men would get married or just write a woman's name to their card so that they could stay with them so that they wouldn't be sent away.

And they felt they had these cards and they were secure with these cards. And as a matter of fact, when we wrote them letters from Czernowitz to come, they said they had the cards, and right now they're leaving them alone. So these cards were like a false security for them. I don't know why the Judenrat did not look into this and made them more aware that this is a false security. They saw all these things happening anyway.

To get back to Kutu, the next thing that happened was also in April. It was April 24 of the same year, 1942. The Jews that did not have these working cards and could not work were lined up on several roads leading to Kolomyia. They were sentenced to death. The march was called the March of the Living Dead.

They were primarily old people, sick people, women, and children, and young men who could not find work to do. Now, many of these old people did not want to go. They felt they were going to their death. They wanted to die at home. My dad writes in the book, he tells the name of this one son who after the mother begged him and begged him, poisoned her so that she would not go on this march. The other people that were lined up there, they had nothing with them. They had nothing left to take with them. And they knew this was their last journey.

OK. Well, they were going to Kolomyia. But from there, of course, they were being taken to the gas chambers of the ghettos. And they knew it. They knew it. That's what was happening to them. What I meant to say, they were going to the Kolomyia ghettos. And from there, they were going to end up in the gas chambers. And all these people knew it.

So at that point, you knew about the gas chambers.

They knew it. Yes, they did. But my dad writes, most of them were so-- like I say, they were the old, the sick-- they just had it. They just were starving without the food. They had nothing left. And they just resigned themselves. They just couldn't live.

Now, September the 7th, the Judenrat got an order from the Gestapo to call all the Jews together on some reason they had to check some things on their cards, whatever. At that time, September the 7th--

What year?

'42. The Jews knew they just didn't trust it anymore. They knew they were calling them together, and many times when that happened, they never returned home. So many tried to flee. 250 tried to cross the Romanian border. They actually handed themselves over to the Romanian border guards. And the others that showed up at this meeting, they were right. They shouldn't have, because everybody who showed up at this meeting, they were taken to a certain place in Kutuy.

And the 250 that tried to escape across the border, they were returned as well. The Romanian border guards returned them to the Gestapo in Kutuy. So they brought them there too. And after they gathered them together, they lined them up a certain way.

My dad writes they put the men in the center and the women and children on either side of them so that they could watch them and that they wouldn't run away. Now, my dad knew all this. He knew exactly what was happening because, as I said, he had a huge lumber yard in the area at one time. And he had all these people working for him, and they brought him all this information. He told them.

He told them he wanted the information-- he has a book and he wants the information. And they did it. They gave him the information. Now, just to show you-- I was saying these peasants helped dad with this-- in Kutuy, there were many Ukrainian priests. When they preached to their congregation, they would tell them, don't give the Jews food. Don't help them. They would say, their own God has forsaken them. Why would you help?

But there was one that did-- one priest who did. He saved some of the Torahs from-- and I think he might have even helped some people in town. So these peasants gave my father information that he kept-- helped him to write the diary. So he knew he knew, for example, that this gathering, as I said, in Kutuy on September the 8th, 1942-- this one German officer came, and he sorted out the people.

The weak people, they were shot right there. The strong that he felt were strong enough to work, he sent to camps for work in Lemberg. And the others, he packed off in wagons and he sent them to Belz. Now, the Jews in Lemberg, they were sent for work, they died from hunger, and beatings, and the hard work.

Every day before they started to work, the Germans made them run. And if they couldn't run, the ones that dropped, they would just shoot them. And the ones that went in the wagons to camp, they were like 200 to 300 packed-- and they just died on the way from starvation and lack of air. And of course, whoever reached there died in the camp.

There were 2,500 Jews in Kutuy. And November 1943, the Jews in Kutuy were all liquidated, as well as the surrounding areas-- all the towns in the surrounding areas. Now, the Germans had various liquidation systems as a whole, and they did it in different manners.

If they decided to liquidate the Jews in a small town, it took them maybe one akcion to do it. They would go screaming, Jude heraus That means, Jew get out from the house. And they would shoot them. They would make mass graves out of town and shoot them all at once. And that would be it.

In other areas where there were more Jews, they decided to put them in a ghetto area, which means they had certain streets where the Jews had to stay and live. And the Ukrainian police watched so that nobody would escape. And that's what they did in other areas. And I will mention certain towns here that I picked out of the book, Polish towns, there were many more that dad mentions, but I would like to mention these because I think they sort of stood out in my mind anyway.

For example, in Kolomyia, they had a ghetto. It was so overcrowded that they took 20 to 30 people in a room. They just didn't have enough space for all these people. They just put them there. People were sleeping on the streets. So they came up with this system, the Gestapo.

What they would do is they would have several akcjas. And in one, they would come, and they would just take out the old people and take them away. In another one, they would come for the women, in another one, for the children. And in that way, there would be less people there. The men, they were out to work for the hard work labor.

They would come home after work, they wouldn't see their families anymore. They'd be gone. Then when the ghetto was mostly all out, nobody there, they were tortured. And whoever was left in there would just die. They were tortured from all sides, and they would burn it down. Now, another one is Stanislav. I wanted to mention something about Kolomyia too, because that was sort of another thing that I read about it in the book.

After they took the women, the children, and the old people away from Kolomyia, the Germans decided, the SS decided, they didn't really see any blood, they said, because they took them all away. They didn't see any blood. They ordered 250 Jews lined up, and they shot them so that they could see blood.

Well, that was Kolomyia. Then was Stanislav. And Stanislav, the German Gestapo decided they were going to take all the professional people out of the town-- all the doctors, all the lawyers. They came, and that's all they took. Their families didn't know what happened to them.

Jews only?

Jews. Jews only. So the families tried to find out what happened. So the Gestapo told them, we're taking them away. Bring food and clothing for them. The Jewish families-- the parents, the mothers, they brought everything they had for their sons, for their husbands-- everything. The Gestapo took it all. A few days later, they found out they were all murdered, all killed, and put in mass graves. So that was Stanislav.

That was September 7, 1941. My dad has dates and information-- exact dates-- on what happened in all these places. Then there was Zabolotiv. In Zabolotiv, they had men working over a bridge. They had to repair this bridge. The Polish students, Ukrainians, and the Gestapo closed up the street and entered the houses in town, took the Jews out in cars. They had mass graves outside the city prepared for them.

And as they were taking them to their death, the men working over the bridge saw their families being taken to the graves. That was the last time that they saw their children, their wives, and everybody. In Horodenka, the Gestapo told the Jews to pack their things and to come to a certain gathering. When they came there too, they took them away to the mass graves and shot them.

Then they went to the Judenrat and demanded money for each person to cover for the bullet that they shot each person. And the Judenrat went to the Jews-- in other areas, I would suppose, because there weren't many left there-- to get money to pay the Nazis for the bullets.

In [? Otanya, ?] they came in the middle of the night. They got the Jews out of their house. They weren't even dressed. They had no clothes on. Some tried to run away, the Ukrainians ran after them, and they slaughtered them with knives as they were trying to run. In [? Jobya-- ?] in [? Jobya, ?] the Ukrainians had a great part in liquidating the Jews.

The Ukrainian police told the Jews to go to a certain designated area. They did it. The Gestapo gave them the right to do whatever they wanted there. They robbed the homes after the Jews left the homes, and the Ukrainians themselves slaughtered the Jews. Then they called the Gestapo to come and finish off whatever was left there. Well, those are just some examples of what happened to people in some of the Polish towns. There are many more that my dad mentions, writes about, and even has names of people that died there and how they died.

Now, in 1944, when we were still in Czernowitz, Romania-- that was after the war-- dad decided that he was going to go back to Kutly for the last time and see what was there. When he got there, he says the town was ghostly. He saw nobody around. Not even Ukrainians were walking around. He felt somehow they were more afraid of the Jewish ghosts than they were of the living people that were there.

He said he went to town, and it was very painful for him because he remembered his memories of the town where he used to spend with his friends. And as he was walking around, one man, a Gentile-- I guess a Ukrainian-- recognized him. He came over and he touched him, because he couldn't believe that my dad was there and was alive. He crossed himself and ran away.

My dad walked over to the graves where the people were buried. There was no sign there-- nothing. So he tore a white wooden plank from a fence, and he wrote on it in charcoal-- here are resting the [NON-ENGLISH] souls-- men, women, and children who were, on April 10, 1942, by the Germans and Ukrainians, in a murderous fashion annihilated. And that was the last time that my dad was in Kutuy. And that was it. I can tell you a little bit now about my family if you're interested.

I would like to know about your upbringing. Did you come from a religious family?

My background was religious. My grandfather, my mother's father, Liebergal, was a rabbi. We were religious. At home, I guess we were religious-- not in the sense that we wore the [NON-ENGLISH] and were ultra ultra-religious, as some people were mystically religious, but I came from a kosher home. Yes.

I did have some questions. I was not quite clear about-- you mentioned that your father had found out about what had happened in another town, I think it was Kosov. And then he came back and began to prepare a hiding place. Do you have any idea how much time elapsed or how much time it took to put together this hiding place?

It took a while, because we had to do it at night. They were digging, I remember, and carrying it in bags out-- the earth from under the ground. And so the whole thing must have taken a while. I guess we were lucky to have the time before the first akcja actually happened. But it took a while.

Do you remember there being a sense of urgency to hurry up and get it done?

Yes, because dad knew it was going to come. And as I said, we afterwards timed ourselves to see how long it would take us to get down there. We were prepared. We were definitely prepared. We knew that they were going to come into the town and it was just a question of when.

And during the day, we had constant watch from the window to see if they were coming. And they came from the direction of the Kolomyia road. And so they were just constantly looking in that direction to see. And so it was just a matter of time.

Prior to that, did you have any idea of how Jews were being treated in the areas of Poland that had been occupied by the Nazis?

Well, it was difficult to find out, because as I said, they would disrupt communication. Like this man who came to town to tell us about Kosov-- we knew that things were happening. I'm not sure just how much in detail we knew at every moment when it was happening. But dad did get all the information, because if you read his book, you'd see he puts down dates and even the day of the week when it happened-- whether it's morning or night.

They came in the middle of the night, he would say, and he would give you the date, and when they did, and what they did. It was his mission. That was his mission, his goal in life. I can't believe sometimes thinking about it, what he must have felt seeing his friends and people he knew dead before him and helping to bury them.

And he felt he had a mission. He felt the world didn't know about this, and he would let them know about this. And he wanted to write down the names of the people who did it-- and he does in the book. He even writes down the SS people who did some of these things-- and he writes down the names. He has all the names of the people that died and how they died.

He did nothing but write for five years during the Holocaust days in the war of what was happening in Poland. And then when we came to America, he wrote this book himself. He got a Hebrew typewriter-- and he had a grocery store when

he came here-- and he just sat and wrote the book himself. So he was very dedicated in finding out whatever he could.

And I think the fact that he lived there during the time that all this was happening, and when he found something out, it was within a day or two of what was happening, would be the right information. Because when you get something a year later, two years later from something, that's something else. But he knew-- and like I said, his mother, for example, he got her off the death march. She was on her way to be taken on the death march, which was the last akcja in Kutu. So he had all the information. He knew just when it was happening and the dates as well.

We're going to pause so I can change the tape.