

This is tape two, side A. We are interviewing Rhoda Kuflik. I wanted to ask you if anything has come to your mind in the few minutes that it took me to flip the tape. Did you come up with any other memories that you wanted to share?

Well, yes. As a matter of fact, I showed you a picture before that I have from my pictures that I saved from Kutny. And I'm wearing this little polka dot dress. And that really stands out in my mind because after the Aktion in Kutny in April of 1942 when we came out from our hiding, what I remember, too, is my neighbor's little girl across the street, a Gentile family, peasants-- Polish peasants, the little girl was wearing my clothes.

She's wearing the same dress. She's wearing the polka dot dress with the same little apron-- little apron that I had on. And I remember telling my mother, look, mom, look. And my mom says, shh, don't say anything.

Because you were asking me about what I told to-- so I knew this-- you just had to accept certain things. But I also was thinking of something which I do want to say again. I personally feel that if it hadn't been for the Ukrainians, I don't think the Nazis would have gotten every single Jew.

Because the Ukrainians went and thought out whatever Jew tried to escape, or tried to run away, or tried to hide, they were the Nazis' and the Gestapo's right hand. They were the people who carried out some of the things for them. The Gestapo used to come down in their cars with the machine guns for the murder, for the final blow.

Or the days when they drove around on their motorcycles just shooting people that they saw wearing the band around the hand saying, Jude. But it was the Ukrainians who went and enforced things. If a Jew hid a piece of cloth or something that they thought he should have given away to them, they shot them.

They ran to the houses to see the Jews didn't hide there when the Gestapo ordered everybody should gather in a certain area. They were the ones, the Ukrainians, that went looking to make sure that everybody was out of the house. My dad tells of his cousin who hid and left his baby in a crib, because they didn't want to take the baby down in the bunker to hide, because it would make a noise and so they left it.

And when the Ukrainians came into the house, not only did they take the cousin, but they saw the baby and they took the baby along. They went looking for everything. And as I'm telling you this, I was thinking of another situation.

I have-- had a cousin, because she's dead now, her name was Khuma, who was the most brightest person I knew. She was like my hero. She was just the person who survived a lot of different happenings in life, too, during the Holocaust.

And she told of a story where she was hiding in a bunker under the ground. And there was a baby down there with them. And when the Gestapo was in their house, the baby started to cry. And the mother took her hand and covered the baby's mouth and choked the baby to death so that the baby would not give away the other people in the bunker.

So all these different thoughts do come to my mind. I can't always think about them at the moment when I'm speaking. But there are lots of different memories that occasionally just kind of come to mind.

I wanted to ask you why you collect yourself? I wanted to ask you what steps your family took to rebuild their lives after the war?

Well, my family, as many other Jewish families, came to various countries, like they went to Israel, they went to-- came to America. And they did quite well. They went to school, educated themselves.

Like my cousin Haim Drukman, who I remember as a kid in Czernowitz when he came across, the story was he went to buy me a strand of beads and-- while it was winter, and he slipped. And instead of going to his mom's house, he decided he wanted to come to our house. And he stayed by us. He had a cast on his leg, and he stayed in our apartment and my mom and dad helped him to get better.

Well, he became a member of parliament now in Israel. And as I said, he's Yeshiva President. He married a lady in

Israel that was voted the woman of the year in Israel, because he and his wife adopted-- can I just speak?

Yeah. I was saying that they adopt-- my cousin Haim, he adopted-- I think they have like seven children. And most of the-- he adopted quite a few of them-- adopted children. But he adopted children that were handicapped.

And each one he helped to get well. So they-- she was voted the mother of the year. She was-- she's a pediatrician in Hadassah Hospital. So people did fine.

In my case, my sister-- I have a sister here that was born here. I have-- as I said, I have a sister that was born in the United States. Her name is Shelly, and she's married, her-- she's Shelly Debate.

She has two children who are beautiful and the brightest. I have-- she's a lawyer and so is her husband. I have-- myself, I'm married to a dermatologist who is quite well known for his work in cryo surgery and very nice looking young man.

And I have three children-- a son who is a doctor, a daughter who's a lawyer, and another daughter who's in medicine. Their names are Melina and Julie and my son's Avery. So my cousin Sally, my cousin Sally is married, and her last name is Sturm.

She has four children and they're all professionals, as well. So from the people that I know, or the ones that are even in Israel, they've gotten to Israel, they all did fine.

I need to back you up just a little bit, though. And can you tell me about the steps that you took to rebuild your life? How did you-- where did you go, first, and how did you begin again?

You have to explain what you mean by that before I go into--

After liberation, let's go back to liberation.

Oh, you mean from Czernowitz where we went.

Exactly.

Wait a minute, let me just think a minute. OK. Let me just see what I've got. Well--

I wanted to know-- the war is over now. You said your father went back to the hometown. But after that, what did you do?

Well, we stayed in Czernowitz for a while, but the Russians, as I said, had come in there. And they were no picnic, either. What they did one day, they decided they needed young people for work.

So my cousin Sally was in school. And so they went to the public schools, the trucks, and they got all the young people from the classrooms to take them away, never to see their families again. Sally said people jumped out of windows so that they would break a leg and let go.

She was on her way, they were marching her to a truck to take them away, when she kind of walked away in a different direction and saved herself. So they did funny things, too, the Russians. And I shouldn't call them funny. They weren't. They were tragic, very tragic.

And we didn't stay there very long. We moved on. We were hoping to come to the United States. We had family here, and we were waiting to get a visa to come here.

So from there, we got a horse and buggy, and we put all our stuff into it. My cousin Khuma, who I mentioned before, was with us, too. She joined us. And we went on to the train station. There is a certain area where we took the train, and we went to Romania, to Bucharest.

While on the train, I remember looking out the train window, and there were wired areas, like camp, and there were Nazis there. And as the train was going by, they were screaming we should help them for food. And people from the train were throwing bread to them, which was a very poignant kind of memory in my mind. They were begging for food.

Anyway, we got to Romania and we stayed in Bucharest. And we kept in touch with our family in America all the time. My dad had a sister here.

And from Romania, we went to Czechoslovakia, to Prague. We stayed there for a while, and then we went-- all this time we were waiting to come to America. We were actually waiting for a visa. It just took this long.

And then from there we were in Italy in the camp, which was for displaced people in Trani. And we stayed there. People in that camp, they had like huge barracks, big rooms. And they divided up these rooms.

They put like little cots in different corners, and they had like curtains drawing around each cot. And that was considered a little room. And people just slept on these cots.

So they were many, many people there, hundreds of people sleeping on these cots. They had a kitchen. They gave us food. They had some shaliach from Israel. They had people coming from Israel to teach us from Israel, and they were speaking Hebrew, and they were showing us how to do needlework, the women, and teaching us Hebrew.

And it was just a good feeling to be together with all these Jews from everywhere. Many from there went to America, and many went to Israel. And that's where we got our passports to go-- come to America.

And we came here. As I said, my dad had a sister. Rosner is her last name, Dora Rosner and Julius Rosner. And so we came here.

And in America, my dad, he could have taught Hebrew. He was very bright, very scholarly, but he needed to earn a living and he felt he could do it better by opening up a small store, which he did, a grocery store.

When did you come to the US?

I have to think. OK. See if you can help me out.

How old were you?

OK. I was-- I think I was about 11. OK. So figure it out. 1937-- no way I can think today. 11 and '37 is 1948.

And where did you settle?

We lived-- first, we lived in King's Highway in Brooklyn-- in Brooklyn. And I went to Brooklyn College. And then my sister was born here in the United States.

I want you to go back and tell me about your father's livelihood, but I have one more question in the interim, as long as I've interrupted you anyway. When you first came here, how are you treated by the Americans?

Very nicely. When I-- first of all, I had pigtails, and they thought I looked like Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz, Judy Garland. And my dad taught me during the war math and everything else. So when I came here, I really was even ahead of my grade. I didn't miss anything out in school work.

And I felt very comfortable here. I mean, I felt like I didn't have to get used to living in America. I felt it was home. I felt very good.

Did anybody ask you or your family about your experiences during the Holocaust?

They did not ask-- well, I was a child. They wouldn't have asked me. And maybe they asked my dad. Well, there was a society in America made up of people who had left Kutny before the Holocaust, before the war, were like my aunt living here. A society of [? Kitevry ?] Jews.

And my dad became the President of the society, and they got together, they did things. I'm sure there were lots of other organizations like this for many of the other people that came from various countries. But that's what they joined.

And they more or less-- yes, they were certainly interested in everything and encouraged-- was very happy about dad having kept this diary, and that he was going to write this book. The book is in the Museum in Yad Vashem in Israel. And it's also in the New York Public Library, the book.

So I think what he did was a miracle. It's not just a book, a miracle.

You mentioned that he was working in a grocery store. So he was working during the day, and writing?

Yes. He worked during the day. He worked very hard during the day in the grocery store carrying packages and working very hard. And at night, he would type on the typewriter the book, yes.

And I think he's mentioned in the Judea Encyclopedia, as well, his work. So he was-- and he had even somebody write him up in the Forverts at that time when we came to America. So he was very happy about that.

And I think he even-- in Israel, he-- from what I remember, he knew one or two people that were in the parliament that knew him, because he was into things. He was interested in things and he's-- he was, I think, a marvelous man.

Did you ever go back to your hometown?

No, I never went back. I always thought as a child that if I ever went back there, I could bring everybody back. I'd walk down the street and there they would be.

And probably took all these years for me to feel that I could really tell about everything and not feel so hurt so that I couldn't talk. But I don't feel I would really want to revisit. There's probably nothing there that was-- from what I understand, Haim went back.

And he said there were condominiums being built. And who knows? But I certainly have no interest to go.

Do you have any idea how many people survived from your town?

My dad mentions in the book the names of three people, or something like that, that he heard got out and survived. But basically, most of the people did not.

How many people in your family altogether survived?

Well, again, it would be the Drukman family, Haim's family, my cousin Sally, and Khuma, and just me and my dad and my mother. My mother had a very big family-- brothers and sisters and-- not many. That's it.

Did you discuss the war years with your parents after you came to this country?

No, I never really did. I don't know why. I guess because I was so young. I guess that's the only reason that I never did, because I was young.

And it was something that happened. It was over. And we had new lives here. And I never thought I'd sit down and talk about it.

My children discussed it with my mother and my dad. They were more interested. They-- I remember always my son would sit with my mother and ask her things, and she would tell him about different little stories about the town and all that. But I don't personally remember really sitting down and talking about it. I really don't.

I wanted to ask you when you lost your parents.

Well, my dad died in 1979, and my mother 1989. Not-- they-- I think my dad was 72-- 71, 72. My mother was 82.

Do you have any recollection on how long it took your father to actually write the book that we have before us today?

I could only guess at it. I know I remember him sitting at that typewriter for many nights and doing it. I would say, like maybe two years, at least.

I did want to ask you if there's anything that you wanted to add before we conclude, if anything else has come to your mind? Again, I realize that you remember episodes, but is there any other image in your mind, any person that stands out in your mind, an event, that you can recall?

Well, one thing I remember, and I know my mother had told this to my son, as well, is that when we were in Kutu at one time, one of the SS people came to our house. And he was telling my parents that his wife wants to have a baby and she can't have a baby. And he said, why don't you give me your little girl?

I will take care of her. At least she'll be alive. Because you certainly don't think you're going to survive this. You're not going to make it.

And it just stands out in my mind how people can sit and talk about this very casually and walk away from it. But he was serious. And I guess we believed him, but we didn't go the next day and take our things and run. That sort of stood out in my mind.

And I'll tell you, there were stories-- I remember in Czernowitz when we were there, nothing terribly-- but there were things lying all over the place, like shells and things. I remember picking up a bullet and playing with it. And then I just threw it away and it exploded.

And nothing happened to me, but I'm just saying these things are lying everywhere. And it was still like after the war and different incidents, which it was just part of life.

You said that the German soldier offered to take you from your parents. Were you blond?

No. No, but I was-- if you look at my pictures, I was cute. I had-- my hair was short, cut very short, butch like, real short, but dark looking. And we were well off to do family once in Kutu, so I had pretty little clothes.

And I had one or two little dresses, and I probably look cute walking around. And he decided this is somebody he'd want to have as a child. It's interesting that he just didn't say, I'm taking her.

But he-- they didn't-- they had certain days that they came for you. And they had certain days that they were going to kill you. And they-- it was all planned out like from A to Z.

And they liquidated all the Jews in Poland in 1943. And Poland was judenfrei. No Jews. And they did it in a systematic manner. There's no question about it.

Because if they came around and they were shooting people on the street with the machine guns, and the next day you could walk out and they wouldn't shoot you. Isn't that interesting?

Why didn't they come all at once and get you? So they had a plan. It was a planned type of thing. And, oh, there's a

story, too, in Kutny, and my dad-- but my dad has lots of these stories.

One of the stories that he tells in the book is the Judenrat. They were the ones that got the Germans everything they needed from the Jews, and if they needed other things. So some of the SS people, they wanted certain villas, certain houses in Kutny.

And the Judenrat got it for them. And when they moved in, they brought their sweethearts and their mother to come to Kutny. And what they did is, the SS, they took them around to show them where they buried the Jews, where the Jews are buried, and to show them how well they're handling the liquidation of the Jews.

We were like, I don't know what specimens in their eyes, really, some things they had to get rid of. And that's what they did. It was like my dad said, the worst tragedy ever, because these were innocent people. No-- didn't do anybody any harm, and they just decided in different fashions to get rid of them.

I thank you very much for doing the interview. I know it was not easy for you today. And with that, I will conclude the interview today.