

Rhoda Kuflik

Tape 1 Side A

July 11, 1997

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Abstract

Rhoda is giving this interview as she wants to tell the story of her survival and supplement the book that her father published in 1958. Her father wrote a diary every day for the five years of the War about what happened to the people in Kuti (?) and in the surrounding towns. Rhoda's family owned a lumber yard and had many friends including gentiles who brought them information about what was happening in the area. She was born Rhozhinka (?) Usonon in October 1937 in Kuti (?) located in southeast Poland near the Ukraine. There the Judenrat handed out working cards to the Jews which enabled them to work but gave them a false security that as long as they worked, they would be saved. Jews age 10 and older had to wear a white band on their left arm with the word, "Juden" on a star. The Germans had a systematic plan of killing the Jews in Poland. The first incident they heard about was 10 miles away in October '41 in Kosice (?). They thought the Germans would come next to Kuti (?) where they were starving, cold and ready to move on to some other place. Then they found out that the people in Kosice (?) were killed instead of being taken away. Rhoda's family dug a hole in the ground near a wall where the closet was standing where they hid on April 10, 1942, during Pesach when the first Actia took place. Ukrainians threw hand grenades into the ghetto area and caught children and threw them into the flames. They molested women and shot them. " On April 11, 1942 the Germans came with an order that all the Jews must leave in 24 hours for the ghetto in Kolumyya (?). The next day Rhoda left with her mother, Yetta Lebergal (?) and her father at night for the Romanian border. They jumped on a train where the conductor saved their lives. They lived in an apartment in Chernovtsy (?), Romania where they awaited their papers. On April 24 1942, the Jews without work cards lined up on several roads leading to Kolumyya (?). It was called the "March of the Living Dead." The old, sick, women and children and young men who did not have work were in the line. The people knew that from the Kolumyya Ghetto, they would be sent to the gas chambers. On September 8, 1942 a German officer came and sorted out the people. Those who were weak were shot. The Jews who were strong were sent to Lemburg (?) work camp or to Bellus (?). In November 1943 the 2,500 Jews in Kuti (?) and the surrounding area were liquidated. The Germans had various liquidation systems. In small towns, they had one Actia and shot the Jews and put them in mass graves. Rhoda has poignant memories of Chernovtsy (?) as they were there when the War ended. Her father wanted to return to Kuti (?) and when he arrived saw the town was ghostly with no people, not even Ukrainians. There was one gentile Ukrainian man who recognized him, touched him, crossed himself and ran away as he could not believe her father was still alive.

Rhoda tells about a few incidents that happened during the Holocaust. Once she noticed a neighbor's child was wearing her dress. She felt the Ukrainians were very helpful to the Nazis in finding and killing the Jews. The family ran away by train to Bucharest, Romania. From there they traveled to Prague, Czechoslovakia in search of a visa to get to the US. They were in Chernovtsy when the Soviets liberated them. They ended up in a DP camp in Trani, Italy. In 1948 they came to the US because her aunt lived here. They lived in Brooklyn and her father worked in his grocery store while writing a book on his diary notes. Later Rhoda attended Brooklyn College, got married to a dermatologist and they had three children. She did not discuss the Holocaust with her children so they obtained information from her parents.

Summary

00:00 Rhoda Kuflik was born Rhozhinka (?) Usonon in October 1937 in Kuti (?) located in southeast Poland near the Ukraine and now is part of Ukraine. It is near the River Kirch (?) which divides Romania from the Ukraine. Rhoda is giving this interview as she wants to tell the story of her survival and supplement the book, "History of the Yiskeh (?)" that her father published in 1958. Kuti (?) was a resort town with gardens, flowers, valleys and mountains where people came to vacation. The first Boy Scouts started there and there were artists. It was a nice place to grow up. There was a population of about 2,500 Jews, mostly professionals, living there. Rhoda is making this tape because the book was written in Yiddish and they plan to translate it into English. They want people to understand the book by her father who wrote a diary every day for the five years of the War. He kept information of what happened to the people in Kuti (?) and in the surrounding towns. He published the book 15 years after the War. Rhoda's father felt it was his mission to write the story so people would know what happened as they might not believe that Democratic countries would know nothing and do nothing.

05:00 Her father felt that they would have done something if they had knowledge of the actions by the Germans. The Germans should have been held responsible at a tribunal for the crimes that they committed. Rhoda's family owned a lumber yard and had many friends including gentiles who brought them information about what was happening in the area. The Germans would cut the telephone lines when they were having an action to prevent it being communicated. Besides the Polish towns, Rhoda's father wrote of Hungarian and Romanian people in the area near Kuti (?). Kuti (?) was a typical town with desirable schools and homes of worship. He wrote about how the Jews made a living and how they celebrated occasions. Jewish life before World War II was active in Kuti (?). The Germans divided up Kuti (?) with the Russians by a signed treaty. At the start of World War II the Germans decided that the treaty was no longer valid and belonged only to them. On June 21, 1941 the Germans came into Kuti (?). The German bombing woke up the town and the Russians left the next day. Ukrainian sympathizers became Nazi

sympathizers and started a Police force which robbed Jewish homes and performed much of the killing in Poland. Many Jews would be alive if the Ukrainians did not kill Jews. They would seek them out and turn them over to the Nazis. The Judenrut acted as go-between the Nazis and the Jews. The Judenrut was requested to deliver certain things and would obtain them from the Jews.

- 10:00 The Judenrut handed out work cards to the Jews which enabled them to work. They were required to repair bridges and streets that had been bombed. This gave the Jews a false security that as long as they worked, they would be saved. The Germans had a systematic plan of killing the Jews in Poland. Those age 10 and older had to wear a white band on their left arm with the word, "Juden" on a star. From 12 PM to 12 AM the Jews could not leave home or they would be shot. Rhoda's mother walked outside without her band and was not recognized as a Jew so her life was spared. They lived near the gentiles but they could not have contact with them. They were not permitted to shop in the market place and had to turn over all warm clothes or items of value to the Gestapo or be shot. First the people were starved and then eliminated. This system was followed in many towns. The first incident they heard about was 10 miles away in October '41 in Kosice (?). A man on his way to Kosice (?) could not make a call to the town so they knew the Germans were gathering Jews and telling them to take a small pack with them to a concentration camp. They thought the Germans would come next to Kuti (?) where they were starving, cold and ready to move on to some other place. Then they found out that the people in Kosice (?) were killed instead of being taken away. Her father got a note that they needed a doctor for a sick child to enable them to get a wagon and horse and go to Kosice (?) where they saw homes demolished and broken doors and a mass grave in the middle of the town.
- 15:00 Their cousin told them the Nazis had gathered Jews, shot them and put them in graves. They cracked the skulls of small children and kicked them into the graves. A young doctor was told that he could live but he chose to be with his bride. Her father noted the names of the Jews who had died. Those Jews who remained were sent to Kalmia (?). The old and young had been shot. The rest went to labor camps via wagons where they died from lack of air and food. Her father returned from Kosice (?) and believed the same would happen in Kuti (?). That is when he started the diary so the incidents would not be forgotten. Upon his return everyone was disturbed and the people were starving as they could not trade with the Polish peasants. With the trading, there was plundering. Rhoda saw five or six people dying each day. She saw people on the street begging for potato peels. The Jews did not know what to do. They thought it would not happen to them; that a miracle would happen. They had dreams that they would be saved. Some could not believe that G-d could forsake them. Some thought that they would hide.
- 20:00 Rhoda's family dug a hole in the ground near a wall where the closet was standing. They took a shelf out of the closet, like a drawer, and went down into the hole. They dug the

hole at night. They used a ladder to get down. There they placed a pitcher of water and food for three days and a wooden bench to seat 10 to 12 people in the hole. They timed how long it would take to get down. They would look down the road to Kalmia (?) to see when the Germans were coming. On April 10, 1942, during Pesach, the first Actia took place. Large cars came from Kalmia (?) to town and drove to the market place shooting people along the way. Ukrainians threw hand grenades into the ghetto area. A sea of smoke arose and they caught children and threw them into the flames. They molested women and shot them. People jumped from the roof. 950 people were murdered. Her father screamed, "Let's go" and they all ran into the closet through the drawer. They remained until they heard a Jewish voice say, "Come out. They left already" in Yiddish. At first they did not believe it so remained a while longer. Then they came out. The water in the pitcher was mud. The Actia was over and her father helped bury the people.

25:00 There were mass graves. People were searching for bodies. Parents were looking for their children. They saw a man wheeling his 16-year-old dead son. Rhoda's father wrote that he saw three children molded together by blood and he separated them and carried them out. There was a man lying on the ground with his eyes open and he tried to close his eyes. The Ukrainians saw him and laughed. Before the Action, the Jews traded with the Poles in the Black Market. 40,000 Jews lived in Chernovtsy (?) who had to wear Jewish stars were allowed to shop and lead normal lives. Two days after the Actia, her father decided to leave and took Rhoda and her mother, Yetta Lebergal (?). Her Yiddish name is Rifka. That night they walked outside and saw people with white sheets on the roof trying to put out the flames. Rhoda was an only child. They left at night for the Romanian border. Her father carried her on his back. At the border, they saw silhouettes of German soldiers. A peasant who was helping them told her parents that they must separate as it would be safer. Rhoda slept in his attic until about four or five when she woke up. It was still night and she was taken to the train station. The train would not stop, only slow down.

30:00 Her parents were waiting there. Her father grabbed her and her mother and jumped on the slowly moving train. The conductor came and realized that they were Jews escaping and put them in a private area of the train. He said, "sit here" and told them if the Germans come searching for their passport, tell them they are taking their child to Chernovtsy (?) to the doctor. The conductor saved their lives. At Chernovtsy (?) they did not have the necessary passport as they brought nothing with them. Her father wore his jacket which was a miracle. When they left, the Germans had gone through their home and messed it up. Rhoda had placed photos in the pocket of that jacket and when they arrived in Chernovtsy (?), her father put his hand in the pocket and found them. They were wedding photos and pictures of Rhoda and her father which he placed in his book. The way to Romania was perilous. When people tried to cross the border, they were turned over to the Gestapo who sent them to Transnistria (?), a concentration camp,

so many did not try to escape. If they got papers, they were saved and would not be turned over to the Gestapo. Since Rhoda's family had no papers, they had to hide. They hid at a dentist, Kerna (?), and stayed one or two days. Then they went to Sctnovor (?) and at night went out to the courtyard to get some air. Next they stayed in the attic of Dora Klein's (a Jewish lady) apartment house. After a few days she came and got them down to her apartment as the Germans were coming. The Germans did not go upstairs so they were saved and eventually they got the necessary papers.

- 35:00 They lived in an apartment in Romania across the street from a Caserne, a canteen for the Nazis. A Jew came along and a Nazi slapped him for not wearing a Jewish star which he actually had on. The man said nothing and just walked on. Rhoda wiped the window she was looking out so that nothing would be left of her breath. Her father knew peasants who brought over other people including their cousin, Sally, who stayed with them. They crossed the border with her parents. They put Sally on a train on a Saturday but they did not travel on Saturday so went on Sunday and never saw her again. **Tape 1, Side B.** Rhoda's father sent letters to Kuti (?) and told people to save themselves and come. The people in Kuti (?) felt the false work cards were safe and did not try to leave. Her father got his mother off a death march and his sister, and her son, Chaim Druckman, head of the Yeshiva in Jerusalem now and a former member of Israeli Parliament. Her father sent away a boy from her house who said, "Hitler uber alles (Hitler above all)" and was raised by Germans.
- 40:00 She has poignant memories of Chernovtsy (?) as they were there when the War ended. One day the Germans were running away. All panic feelings were gone. People left their homes and walked on the street and occupied empty houses. There were no clothes in the houses but there was furniture. She saw Germans who brought prisoners into town with the help of the Russians. She remembers feeling as if taken prisoner. She stopped crying. Since it is over, the Germans can now cry. They remained in Chernovtsy (?) awhile. When the crowd border moved to Chernovtsy (?), she fell into the river and her mother said she did not make a sound as was not scared. When she was at the first place, the dentist's, she spoke up and someone said you cannot speak loud. Rhoda forgot her own voice. In Kuti (?), sitting by the window and looking outside, she saw her mother's brother walk down the street and a priest came in his direction. A Jew was not permitted to walk on the street with a gentile so her uncle ran off the street so he would not be in the priest's way. There were unspoken rules of when to be afraid or quiet. They awaited their papers in Chernovtsy (?). They hid and did not go out and were quiet.
- 45:00 The children were not scared. Rhoda saw her mother cry when her brother was sent to a concentration camp. When they hid underground in Kuti (?), they sat on a wooden bench and did nothing but listened for voices. The Actia happened and the people screamed so they waited a day and a half or two days to come out. It was dark and she saw flames. They went next door and saw the half-dead daughter and later heard the neighbor was

taken to a concentration camp and jumped out of the train and died. Their Cousin Sally lived in a Jewish area and hid under a stove in the ground. She breathed air through the stove and when she got out she heard sailing sounds. She did not hear such sounds in the gentile area. There was a hole in the wall to the outside for air. Rhoda's father maintained contact with the peasants from Kuti (?) so he knew the dates and how many people were killed to note in his diary.

- 50:00 He wrote in it on April 11, 1942 that the Germans came with an order that all the Jews must leave in 24 hours for the ghetto in Kolumyya (?). Rhoda's family left the next day, on the 12th. The order was not carried out as there were many bodies to clean up and the Germans needed Jews to work so postponed the order. The only people permitted in Kuti (?) were those with work cards. The Judenrut had the power to give out the cards. People from Kuti (?) wrote to come as they felt secure with the work cards but it turned out to be false security. On April 24 1942, the Jews without the cards lined up on several roads leading to Kolumyya. It was called the "March of the Living Dead." The old, sick, women and children and young men who did not have work were in the line. Old people wanted to die at home so did not go. One woman begged to be poisoned. Those who lined up had nothing to take with them. The people knew that from the Kolumyya Ghetto, they would be sent to the gas chambers.
- 55:00 They were starving so resigned themselves that they could not continue to live anyway. On September 7, 1942 the Judenrut got an order from the Germans to call the Jews together. The Jews did not trust anyone and thought they would not be able to return home. 250 Jews fled across the Romanian border and those who showed up were taken to Kuti (?). Those fleeing were stopped by the guards who returned them to the Gestapo. The people were lined up in a certain way with the men in the center and the women and children on the sides so they would not run away. Rhoda's father told the peasants that he was writing a book and required information and they gave it to him. Many Ukrainian priests told the people not to give food to the Jews as their own G-d forsook them so why should you help. One priest saved torahs so helped the Jews.
- 60:00 On September 8, 1942 a German officer came and sorted out the people. Those who were weak were shot. The Jews who were strong were sent to Lemburg (?) work camp or to Bellus (?). Those in the work camp died from beatings and hard work. Every day the Germans made them run and if they could not, they were shot. 200 to 300 of those Jews who were picked died from starvation or at the camp. In November 1943 the 2,500 Jews in Kuti (?) and the surrounding area were liquidated. The Germans had various liquidation systems. In small towns, they had one Actia and shot the Jews and put them in mass graves. More Jews were placed in the Ghetto and the Ukrainians watched that they did not escape. Certain Polish towns stood out to Rhoda's father. One was Kolumyya with an overcrowded ghetto where 20 to 30 people were in one room and people slept on the street. There the Gestapo had several Actia. First they took out the

old people. Then they took out the women. Finally, they took the children. The men were sent for hard labor and when they returned, they could not find their family.

65:00 Those people who were left were tortured and their homes were burned down. In Kolumyya, after the women, children and old were taken away, the Gestapo saw no blood. They lined up 250 Jews and shot them to see blood. Stanislaw (?) took all the professional Jews including doctors and lawyers out of town. Their families tried to find out what happened to them. The Gestapo told them to bring food and clothing for them and the family gave it and later found out that all their relatives had been killed and put in mass graves on September 7, 1941. Zablatov (?) was a man who was repairing the bridge. A Polish student and the Gestapo closed the street. They took Jews in cars to their death. The man on the bridge saw children and wives taken to graves. In Horagandov (?) the Gestapo told the Jews to pack and took them to a gathering place and then took them away and shot them. Then the Gestapo asked the Judenrut to pay for each bullet and they got the money from the Jews to pay. Natango (?) came in the middle of the night with no clothes on. The Ukrainians slaughter with a knife. They said to go to a designated area and robbed their homes and slaughtered the Jews. 1,744 Jews were still in Chernovtsy (?), Romania after the War. Her father wanted to return to Kuti (?) and when he arrived saw the town was ghostly with no people, not even Ukrainians. It was painful as he had bad memories. There was one gentile Ukrainian man who recognized him and touched him and crossed himself. Then he ran away as he could not believe her father was still alive. There was no sign where people were buried so her father wrote on a sign, "Here are resting people and children murdered by the Ukrainians." It was the last time her father was there. They had a religious background.

70:00 Liebe Gell was a Rabbi in their family. They had a religious and kosher home but did not wear Strumas (large black hat) and were not ultra religious. Her father prepared the hiding place at night. They carried bags of dirt outside the house which took awhile. They felt a sense of urgency. The family got prepared as they knew the Germans were coming. During the day, they held a constant watch. The Germans came from the Kolumyya Road. The Germans disrupted the Communists at places having Actia. Her father got much information including dates, day of the week, time of day and what occurred. He considered this to be his mission in life. He saw his friends die and helped to bury them as felt the world would not know about it. Her father knew the names of people who conducted the Actia, names of those who died and how they died. He kept his journal for five years and when he came to America, started writing his book. He got a Hebrew typewriter. They had a grocery store and worked and wrote the book. He wrote facts down as they happened so he was accurate. His mother was on the last Actia and he saved her.

Rhoda Kuflik

Tape 2 Side A

July 11, 1997

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00:00 Rhoda shows an old photo of her in a polka dot dress. She remembers that after the Action in Khotin (?) in April 1942, they came out of hiding and she saw the gentile peasant Polish girl across the street wearing the dress and its matching apron. She pointed this out to her mother who said, "Ssh, do not say anything." She realized that some things you must accept. Rhoda feels that if not for the Ukrainians, the Nazis would not have killed every Jew. The Ukrainians did the work for the Gestapo. The Gestapo either came with machine guns or came on motorcycles looking for Jews with the symbol, "Juden." The Ukrainians found the Jews and either shot them or told the Gestapo. A cousin left her baby and hid but the Ukrainians found both the baby and the cousin. Her cousin, Chuma (?), was bright and was her hero. She said she hid in a bunker with a mother and her baby. The baby was crying when the Nazis came so the mother choked the baby. After the War, her family, like others, went to Israel and America. They did well and went to school, like Cousin Chaim Brickman.

05:00. When they were in Chernovtsy, he wanted to buy her beads and he fell and had a cast on his leg. He became a member of the Parliament of Israel and his wife was voted the "Woman of the Year" because they adopted seven handicapped children. The wife is a pediatrician at Hadassah Hospital. Rhoda's sister, Shelly Delate (?) was born here. She is married with two beautiful and bright children. Shelly and her husband are lawyers. Rhoda is married to a dermatologist who is nice looking and they have three children. Their son, Alex, is a doctor, one daughter is a lawyer and their daughter, Melene (?) is in medicine. Her Cousin Sally Stern is married and has four professional children. The survivors she knows are fine, even those in Israel. After they were liberated in Chernovtsy, they remained awhile. The Russians were the occupiers and they needed young people for work. Her Cousin Sally tells how the Soviets took trucks to her public school and was taken away. As she marched to the truck, she ran away, thus saving herself. Rhoda's family wanted a visa to get to the US. They got a horse and buggy for their belongings and their Cousin Chuma (?) joined them. They took a train to Bucharest, Romania.

10:00 The people looked out the window of the train and saw Nazis in camps surrounded by wire. The Nazis were begging for food so the people threw bread at them. The family kept in touch with the father's sister in America. They went to Prague, Czechoslovakia and continued to try to get a visa to the US. Next they went to a DP camp in Trani, Italy, where the huge barracks were divided up into rooms with cots surrounded by curtains.

There were hundreds of people, a kitchen for their food and lessons by Israelis in needlework and Hebrew. It was good to be together with other Jews. Many went to Israel and America. Finally, they got passports to America where her father's sister, Dora lived with her husband, Julius Rosner. Her father could have taught Hebrew as he was bright and scholarly but he thought he would make more money in a grocery store. They came to the US in 1948 when she was 11 years old and lived on Kings Highway in Brooklyn. Rhoda attended Brooklyn College and her sister was born in Brooklyn. Rhoda felt she was treated nicely by the Americans. She wore her hair in pigtails and they thought she looked like Dorothy (Judy Garland) in the Wizard of Oz. Her father taught her so she was ahead of her grade. Nobody questioned her about the Holocaust.

15:00 There was a society of people from Khutin (?) who came to the US before the War. Rhoda's father became president of the society. They got together and did things. They were happy that her father kept the diary. Her father worked hard during the day in the grocery carrying packages and wrote his book at night. His book is in Yad Vashem in Israel and in the New York Public Library. What he did was a miracle. He was mentioned in the Judaica Encyclopedia and in the Forward. She knew a person in Parliament who was interested in this. He was a marvelous man. He never returned to Khutin (?) but thought if he went back, he could bring everyone back, too. It took all these years for her to tell these things. She does not want to visit Khutin (?) because it would be different now. Chaim returned and he saw condominiums. Her father's book indicates that three people from Khutin (?) survived but most did not. Survivors include the Drucken family, the Dalls (?) and her family. She did not discuss the Holocaust with her family. Perhaps because she was so young and it is over and she had a new life. Rhoda did not think she would ever talk about it.

20:00 Her children were interested and spoke to her parents about it. Her father died in 1979 at age 72 and her mother in 1989 at 82. It took her father about two years to write the book. Her mother told Rhoda's sons about it. Rhoda remembers a German SS visiting the family in Khutin (?) and asked to take Rhoda as they could not have a baby and she would survive. She finds it surprising that people spoke so casually about their dying. Although they believed the SS officer that they would be killed, they did not run away the next day. She saw things laying around in Chernovtsy and picked up a bullet and played with it. When she threw it down, it exploded but nothing happened to her. The German officer wanted to take her although she was not blond but she was cute, with short, butch-like hair and dressed in pretty clothes. The Germans had a plan so that certain days they would come to kill you.

25:00 In 1943 all the Jews were liquidated and Poland was Juden-free. The Germans had a system so that some days they would shoot you and other days they did not. The Judenrat Council got everything from the Jews that the Germans required. The Germans moved into certain houses and villas with their sweethearts and mothers and showed

them where they buried the Jews and how well they handled the liquidation of the Jews. It was as if the Jews were specimens. Her father said that it was the worse tragedy ever. The Jews were innocent people and did not harm anyone.

26:00