

## **RG-50.407.0158**

### **Summary**

Victor Sirota was born on May 2nd 1928, in Ribnitsa, Moldavian SSR. His mother's name was Ester, brother's name was Yaniy; sister's name was Fanya;

His mother and father were born in 1902. His mother wasn't educated, she came from a poor family with three sisters. His father came from a poor family, he was injured during World War I. His parents met in Odesskay county, then they moved to Ribnitsa.

His parents had 6 children, but during the starvation three children died.

His father worked in the bakery, he had lung problems and he died in 1931. He remembered his aunt Petya, who didn't have a family. His uncle on the father's side had a big family.

His mother worked all the time, they were very very poor. The starvation was terrible, they had to stay in line all day long to get a loaf of bread.

Victor went to a Jewish school, he studied Yiddish and regular subjects. After the 3d grade he went to the Ukrainian school.

Victor remembered that half of the population in the town was Jewish. They had vibrant Jewish cultural life. They had an armature drama theatre, Jewish orchestra, art studio. The city was beautiful it bordered with Bessarabia, Romania.

His mother used to go to the synagogue. The rabbi from their synagogue survived German occupation, and he immigrated to Canada in 1970.

At home they spoke Yiddish, at school they spoke Russian. Before the war people spoke Yiddish on the streets of the city. However, in other places, like Krivoy Rog, one could have been killed for speaking Yiddish; it was a working class very anti-Semitic city. When Victor was a child he played only with Jewish kids, because they lived on the "Jewish street".

In his town Jews, and Russian, and Ukrainians had good relations. He didn't remember being called names. They lived in their own house.

Victor remembered the first day of the war June 21,1941. It was Sunday and he went to the park. On the way home at about 4:00 pm he saw a big crowd at the radio transistor on the street. Then he learned that Germans attacked the Soviet Union. He heard Molotov's voice saying, that the Soviet army will defeat Germany. However, in 2-3 hours German plains started bombing their city.

They never thought that the war would last for four years. Many Jewish people had very high regards for German culture and didn't want to believe that they were in grave danger. His uncle was telling people, that it was not true that Germany was against Jews, he suggested that it was the Soviet propaganda. His views cost him his life.

Victor heard on the "secret" radio transmission from Germany, he remembered Hitler's voice announcing his plan to eliminate the Jews.

When Germans occupied the city, his uncle thought that pretending that his family had typhoid would save them. However, German soldiers went to their house and shot them all in their own beds.

Victor's family was evacuated to the small village Kruti, 50 kilometers from the city. Victor remembered that soon after they moved to the village there was a big battle that lasted 12 days. He was 13 years old and he had to dig the potatoes and other vegetables under the bullets.

The German soldiers in uniforms and in the cars occupied the village. Two days later the special police unit - the hit squad, arrived and started looking for the Jewish people. Local people, Russians and Ukrainians became policemen and worked for the Germans.

Policemen brought Jews and Russian communists to the walls of the Turkish Fort where they killed them. First, they gathered men, they undressed them and shot them naked. Victor learned that undressing people was the way of humiliation.

Victor remembered when the German soldier came to their house and told them to get out, his brother ran out through the window. His family was taken to the fort's basement, where Germans kept many Jewish people. Later in the evening they ordered everybody to start walking away from the village. They walked for many hours through the woods. In the morning they saw the German soldiers yelling: "Jew". They were brought to the village Sheshnitsa, to the administrative building. The area was filled with thousands of Jews including Jews from Bessarabia.

People were told to sit under the July sun for hours without food or water. One German soldier allowed to get water for gold items.

On the third day a German commander came with the interpreter and announced that all men should go to work and that they would get a kilogram of bread. Victor jumped into the line with the men, but his mother and another woman pulled their boys out and hid them behind the women. When the men and the boys were moved away, German's moved the guards away. Victor looked around and he thought it was safe to get out, but a German soldier saw him and hit him across the back with a wooden stick and told him to follow the group with the men. However, Victor didn't find them and returned back.

Later Victor and his mother decided to go back to the village and on the way back they discovered that all men and boys were shot. Victor knows people from the village Kruti, who witnessed that mass murder of Jewish people.

In the village they reunited with his brother and his aunt. They decided to go back to their town Ribnitsa. Victor remembered that in Ribnitsa many Jews were killed, thrown into the river, but many Jewish people still lived in their own homes. The commandant of the city was a Romanian general Popesko Koru, who was trying to prevent killing of Jews.

At the end of the summer many Jewish homes were burned down, and all Jews were moved into the ghetto surrounded by the barb wire. They were not allowed to leave the area without a special pass. They had to wear a Star of David on the front and the back of their clothes. Every couple of months the Germans checked the ghetto and were ordered to shoot Jews on the spot.

The Jews from Bessarabia were transferred to the Soviet area through Ribnitsa. He heard that four thousand Jews were transported from Romania to Ribnitsa. Some people were able to run away and move into the ghettos on their way, but the majority were killed.

Victor thinks that there were about seventeen thousand Jews in his ghetto. 1941-1942 was a terrible time for the Jewish people, constant round-ups and shootings. His mother once dropped on the floor and started kissing the boots of the German soldier and begged not to kill her boys.

In 1943-44 the Romanian gendarmes replaced the German gendarmes and they were more sympathetic to the Jews; in a way they protected Jews from violence of local people.

In the ghetto there were different people. Some Jews worked with the Germans, they sent his brother to the concentration camp.

Romanian Jews sent parcels with food; flour, even butter to the ghetto. Some people tried to exchange things for food. They all worked. Victor worked for a Polish man, Leskovskiy who treated him well, for Slovak man who had a meat store and tried to send some back to the ghetto people.

Victor remembered that when he with other men was sent to the village Big Maloshi 12 kilometers from the ghetto to dig the ground for construction, he ran away back to the ghetto. The Jewish policemen found him with two boys, took them to the police station. However, they were sent back by a Russian officer, who saw that they were very skinny and young.

In 1942-43 the General Antonescu visited their ghetto. Inside the ghetto they had soap factory, he visited the factory, he treated people nicely. Then the mother Elena, the mother of Romanian king visited Ribnitsa. He also met Molotov in 1954, he visited Krivoy Rog, Koganovitch visited the city.

Victor remembered that in 1944 they were hiding in the basements, because, the Germans were destroying everything and everybody during their retreat, he was sick and coughing. People told him to get out. He saw Vlasovtzi moving through their village. They were setting fires and destroying everything on the way. They arrested the Romanian commandant and gave him 25 years in prison. They burned archives of the ghetto, they hurt and raped Jewish women and even young girls.

Victor remembered that around March 27th, 1944 he was almost killed. The Germans were looking for hidden pigs and they saw him and wanted him to show them houses that were hiding pigs; but when they heard pigs squealing, they forgot about Victor and he was able to escape.

On March 30th 1944, the Soviet Army entered the village. The soldiers looked terrible, they were hungry, poorly dressed. It was a great day of liberation, but the Jewish people who survived were called names. There was a special point in the new documents: "where were you during occupation?" They were under suspicion for surviving occupation.

Victor shows documents related to the ghetto history. In the Ribnitsa ghetto they had Jewish Council that cooperated with the Germans. These people had a lot of power, they reported Jews to the police, they hurt many people. Victor remembered that the Jew sent his brother to the camp. His brother survived and now lives in New York City.

After the war some of these Jews were arrested and sent to prison and camps for 10 years. His mother and brother were witnesses at the criminal court. Victor thinks that these Jews sold themselves in order to save their own lives. Other collaborators; Ukrainians and Russian also were sentenced after the war, except those who ran away.

In 1950 Victor started his mandatory military service, and he was placed into the special unit under KGB - Committee of State Security. He was ordered to go to Kuibashev, Russian Federation, then to Ufa in Bashkir Republic.

He was moved a lot during four years of army services, he was in Birobidzhan, in the area where Soviet Union started working on atomic materials, which was a high security zone, and other places.

In 1953 - during the period known as "Doctor's Plot", (prosecution against Jewish doctors), situation in the army was really bad for the Jewish people. Victor remembered that some Jewish officers were fired, there were incidents of direct insults and intimidation. Victor was interrogated for many hours and threatened just because he was previously sent to visit secure zone.

He remembered an incident when he, as a soldier, was ordered to transport two Ukrainian men who were in prison for collaboration with the Germans and killing the Jews. Even then they tried to intimidate him. Victor remembered many years of intimidation, because he was a Jew.

After finishing four years in the army, in 1944 he went to Krivoy Rog- the city where his father's sister lived after evacuation. He became a hairdresser, he loved his job.

In 1986, at the time of Chernobyl disaster, Victor and four other Jewish men were ordered to go to Chernobyl. He didn't want to go, but he had no choice. He worked there for one month helping people; he remembered human disaster, disorganization, lack of medical help. After Chernobyl he had many health problems and he received a disability. He stayed 12 kilometers from the zone of radiation, but there was no real protection from radiation.

Victor talked with a person who build Chernobyl reactor. According to his information the engineers didn't follow the instructions, which caused a horrific tragedy.

Victor immigrated to Australia several years after his children immigrated. He has been divorced for many years.

He talks about terrible treatment in the Soviet Union, where he left all his money and apartment.

Victor is very proud that his granddaughter follows Jewish holidays.

Victor is very grateful to Australia because, this country offered him financial support; mostly he is happy that his children and granddaughter left the country of antisemitism.

He feels that the "Russian Jews" are not always respected by Jews from other countries, especially by Polish Jews. Victor remembered that the people in his village tried to help and support when Polish Jewish refugees came.

Victor is not accepting religion. Victor thinks that religion led to discrimination and elimination of Jews for thousand years.

His cousin lives in Israel and she told him that in her village Jews were buried alive.

Antisemitism in Ukraine was terrible, worse than in Russian Federation.

Victor didn't want to live in the country that has organization "Pamyti".