

DONOR: RUTH SOSNOWICZ  
INTERVIEWER: SANDRA KLIMAN  
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approx. running time: 65 minutes

Tape Footage: Background

1 - 502 Ruth was born in Lodz, Poland. She had three sisters and four brothers.

Ruth's father owned a sweater factory. They lived in a Jewish district. He was very orthodox.

Before the war Ruth worked for a company in Lodz that colored materials. She was a bookkeeper. She was 22 at the time.

Anti-semitism was so bad in Poland before the war that many people thought it would not be so bad when the Germans came. Ruth's father remembered how the Germans had rescued Jews from the Russians during World War One. He knew what was going on in Germany, but thought maybe G-d was sending the Germans to rescue the Jews from the Poles. The Poles were doing unbelievable things.

WWII

When the Germans came in they removed all the Jews in the Polish government. Jewish men were taken into the Polish Army and killed. Two of Ruth's brothers went into the army, and two of them stayed at home. They were beat very badly by some Poles.

The situation was bad before the Germans came. Then the Germans did not stop the Poles. The Poles had it in their blood to murder, and they did.

503-982 Ruth worked in a Jewish factory. It was closed down. Her father had to close his factory too. There was no income and no means of support for the family.

Jews could not go out on the streets. The Poles would beat, rob and rape whoever they wished, especially young girls.

Ruth's family decided that Ruth and her younger sister should leave Lodz before the Poles brought the Germans to their door. There were Poles living in their area, and they generally did not live as well as the Jews. The Jews didn't drink or fight so they lived better. The Jews in the area helped the Poles a lot, but the Poles forgot all this.

Escape from Lodz

Ruth had a friend living in a nearby town that was under Russian control. Ruth and her sister travelled there by train. They took off their yellow stars. They could only stay there overnight though, because there was not enough food for them there. They left and came to a kind of no-man's land between the Germans and Russians, that was controlled by the Poles.

On the trains the Germans would pull off anyone who looked like a Jew, but wouldn't bother anyone else.

The Poles in this area knew many Jews were travelling and trying to get into the Russian side. They beat, robbed and killed many.

Ruth lost her sister here. They were running at night, and the Poles caught and killed many. Ruth does not know exactly what happened to her sister.

### On the Run

At first Ruth travelled with a few others who had made it safely across, but it was better to travel and hide alone rather than in a group. Then she met up with some others. She was safe. She does not know how this happened. It was pure luck.

Ruth married, and together with her husband wandered from place to place.

983-1485

Ruth's husband was a Jew from Poland. Many couples married at this time because they were afraid to be on their own. Ruth and her husband travelled from town to town, working here and there. No one knew they were Jewish. They did not have a destination. They were just trying to save their lives. Some people were helpful to them because they didn't know they were Jews.

Ruth and her husband arrived in a Crimean town very tired, deciding that whatever will be will be. They had some money, so they asked a man if they could buy bread and spend the night. The man told them he knew who they were, and he agreed to let them stay. But it happened that a Jewish girl had run away to this town and the Ukrainian police were looking for her. They came to this man's door and asked if he had seen any Jews. Ruth and her husband hid. After that they realized they had to leave town right away. The man told them where to hide under straw and hay, and then brought them some food. Then they left.

They always travelled at night, and hid in bushes during the day.

Ruth and her husband found work tending pigs for a Polish man who hated the Germans. They told him that they had run away so they would not be sent to Germany to work. They ate cooked potatoes for a few days there. Then they heard that other workers were arriving, and so they left in the middle of the night. They were always afraid that someone would recognize them.

The Poles could smell the Jews. The Germans did not know who was a Jew. If the Poles hadn't pointed out so many Jews, the Germans could not have killed so many.

In Lodz the Jews use to stand in a bakery line all night waiting for bread. The Poles would come in the morning and kick the Jews out of line, so they would never get bread. Sometimes a nice German soldier would not allow this, or would get the Jews bread from the back.

When Ruth and her husband were living deep in the Ukraine where they knew there were no Poles who might recognize them, Ruth gave birth to a son. She

gave birth in a hospital in an area the Americans were bombing. The mattresses were put on the hospital floor to increase patients chances of survival.

1486-2010 They had the child because they did not believe they would survive.

Ruth and her husband were healthy all through their ordeal. Ruth use to cook special leaves in warm water.

Once they went to a priest to ask for documents so they could move on to another town. They told him they had lost theirs. Ruth's husband was working with the pigs at this time. Later that day the priest came to their room with Polish birth certificates. Ruth is sure he really knew who they were. These certificates helped them survive. With them they could get work and a place to live.

There were no Jews left in this town. The Ukrainians were killing all the Poles living there, so Ruth and her husband were in danger because people thought they were Poles. They escaped at night and hid in a river. Even now it is impossible for Ruth to understand things that happened.

In one town her husband worked in the coal mines. Ruth was at home with the baby when a woman came and told her that the SS was going to check the mines for Jews. Ruth left the baby and went to the coal mine. She spoke good Russian, Ukrainian and Polish, and told the supervisor that her baby was sick and she needed her husband to come home with her right away. He was allowed to leave.

If anyone had found out they were Jews, they would have been killed even without German permission. They couldn't stay anywhere too long because they were always afraid of being found out.

They couldn't tell Russians they were Jewish, because then they would be accused of being spies.

No one was left at Ruth's home when she returned to Lodz.

When Ruth and her husband were staying in Kalshana near the end of the war, Ruth asked a Jewish woman if she could borrow her sewing machine. The woman cursed Ruth because she believed Ruth was Polish. Later this woman found out Ruth was Jewish and she asked Ruth for forgiveness. But Ruth would not forgive her. She had no right to curse Ruth no matter who she thought she was. Ruth never did anything wrong.

2013--2435 Ruth gave birth to her second child after the war. She had two more children in Canada.

Before the war Ruth's husband was a travelling salesman. It was hard for a Jew to get much education. It was very expensive. Only a small percentage of Jews were rich.

He was from a small village where he lived among Poles. He was therefore less religious than Ruth's family. There was no synagogue.

Lodz was a textile city.

After Ruth finished school she worked for her father, like the rest of her siblings. He did not have a big factory. Then Ruth decided she wanted to work somewhere else. She trained on the job as a bookkeeper, and did more than just straight book keeping.

Two months was the longest Ruth and her husband stayed in any one place. They would have been killed with no questions asked.

After the war Ruth returned to Lodz. Her family had been in the ghetto. One of Ruth's brother was an electrician. Although no electricity was allowed for Jews, he used it to make hot tea for his sick father. Someone reported him and the Germans came for the family. They were sent to the first ovens in Poland, the ones at Treblinka. The German said they were being sent to work and where they would be better off. In the ghetto they had nothing to live on. Ruth's parents, two sister and two brothers were taken.

Ruth's other two brothers had been taken into the Polish army and never heard from again. The army killed them. The Germans let her family take all their bedding, and pots etc., and then gassed them.

2436-2760

Ruth and her husband knew when the Germans had lost the war. They were travelling by horse and wagon . Ruth was carrying their son because bombs were falling around them. The Germans had built underground homes furnished with things they had taken from others, and the Russians and Americans were bombing these shelters. Ruth kept seeing decapitated and naked German soldiers on the road, so she knew something had happened. This was the work of the Ukrainians.

#### After the War

Ruth and her husband came to Kalshana. The war was over.

Ruth's husband went to Lodz and said he would send for her and the baby in a few weeks. But the Russians came in to Kalshana and took it over. Ruth explained to the Russians that she was from Poland. They asked her a lot of questions. She was still passing as a Pole. Finally they gave her papers, and she went to Lodz. She went to her parents' home, and no one there even remembered them. The whole building had changed. She now had no home.

The Judenreit arranged for the refugees to stay at the German factories in Lodz. Ruth stayed there for a while, but realized she had no future there. She met an American writer friend of her brother's who had come to Lodz looking for survivors. He gave Ruth money and found her work in a kinder-home outside of Warsaw. She had not found her husband yet.

Ruth worked with nine children. Her son was two and could not live there because of a scarlet fever epidemic. He lived at another home eight kilometers away. Twice a month Ruth went into Lodz by train, which was 50 kilos away. She found some friends and left her address with them, and then one day her husband

appeared.

2761-3289 When her son was picked up to be taken to his home, he cried bitterly. Then he got used to it. At the time the Jewish Congress was paying a lot of money to Gentiles who would bring in Jewish children they had looked after during the war. These children were sent to the U.S.A. to be adopted by Jewish families. Ruth remembers one Polish woman whose husband forced her to give up the child she had cared for for six years.

### Germany

When Ruth's husband appeared, they took their son and arranged to be smuggled into Czechoslovakia, and from there to Germany. In Germany they could register to go to America.

They lived in Munich for three years with an elderly couple, while they waited for their visas. Ruth's husband worked as a driver for UNRA, smuggling people out of Germany. He drove at night, and made a living.

The older couple were very good to them. The man claimed his wife had forced him to become a Nazi so they could live better. Ruth's daughter Ella was born there. The couple were like grandparents to the children.

When Ruth moved to Canada, this couple sent her parcels twice a year. They had begged them not to go to Canada.

### Canada

Ruth and her family arrived in Halifax. Her husband had registered as a tailor. He had just been asked simple questions about the trade. The Jewish Congress paid for the trip, but Ruth and her husband eventually paid them back as was expected.

They settled in Montreal and Ruth's husband found work as a tailor. He didn't know the trade, so he then found work as a presser and was paid \$30 instead of the going rate of \$120. He couldn't make a living, and was anxious to go out on his own. He arranged with the Jewish Colonization Association to be sent to a farm. His family had been farmers.

Ruth and her family were sent to a farm in Hoffer, Saskatchewan. It was not a happy place. They were free, but they had no food.

They wanted to come to Winnipeg, but couldn't save enough money to do so. The Lechinsky family in Estevan helped them. They were beautiful people. He was a cattle dealer and he gave Ruth's husband a truckload of cattle, and told him when he sold them in the fall he could pay him back his costs. In this way, Ruth's husband made enough money to come to Winnipeg.

In Winnipeg they had a grocery store. Ruth's oldest son was old enough to work already when they came to Winnipeg in 1962. They had gone to the farm in 1950.

Ruth will never forget her experiences, but she also can't think about them all the time.

She has four children and loves them very much.

### Memories

3290-3612 When Ruth's husband was working in the coal mines the Germans gathered up people to send to Lodz to work. Ruth and her husband and baby were put on a train, but Ruth knew she could not go there because she would be recognized. When the train stopped at a station she got off with the baby and hid in the washroom. The train left without her. She was in a small place, and began walking in the direction of Odessa. It was a cold morning and her feet got wet. There were only soldiers around, so Ruth approached a German soldier and told him she was on her way to Lodz with her husband and she had missed the train. He took her to the army camp where she repeated her story to a Captain. They gave her a place to stay and food, and said they would try to find her husband. They gave her a uniform to cover herself with at night, and posted a guard so no one would touch her. After a few days they brought her husband to her. They had been very good to her, and helped her with the baby. They wanted to accompany them to Lodz, but Ruth insisted they go on their own. So they took Ruth and her husband to the train, and gave them food for the road.

In Odessa near the end of the war, Ruth overheard German pilots saying they were ashamed to be German soldiers because the Germans had killed innocent people.

3614-3968 In a Ukrainian town near the beginning of the war the Jews had dug graves for themselves. The Ukrainian police lied about what they were for, but the Jews knew. The Jews started to run, and the Ukrainians shot after them. Ruth remembers a woman who had finally had a child after trying for 13 years. She began running holding the baby wrapped in a blanket. She lost the baby and didn't even know it until she had to stop and rest. She cried bitterly. She had been carrying an empty blanket.

This happened often. Babies were lost and some were trampled.

Many Jews during the war decided to live together but Ruth wanted to be married. She borrowed a ring and a Rabbi married her and her husband.

Ruth's oldest son thinks the stories are unbelievable.

Ruth has eight grandchildren. Her oldest son has four children and her youngest son has one. One daughter has one child and one has two.

Ruth has things to be grateful for. She hopes things like she experienced never happen again. Civilians are so helpless. She hopes this was the last war.