

7 pages 11 46

DONOR: ROSE YAKIR
INTERVIEWER: SHELLY LEVIT CALNITSKY
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approx. running time: 80 mins.

Tape Footage: Background

1-830 Rose was born in a little shtetl in the Ukrainian part of Russia on December 28, 1911. She lived with her parents and had three brothers and four sisters. She had many aunts, uncles and cousins. Rose was the youngest girl. She had two younger brothers.

Rose's father was a Hebrew teacher. His father had been a Hebrew teacher and had his own school. Rose's father later became a businessman. Her mother was a housekeeper.

Rose's oldest sister was studying to be a druggist. Her studies were interrupted by World War One. Her other sister was an engineer of incubation. One of her brother's was a stockkeeper. His studies had also been interrupted by the first World War.

Rose began school in 1917. It was a public, Russian school where she learned Russian and Ukrainian. She finished seventh grade. She then went to a big city to complete her education. Hebrew and Yiddish were not allowed to be taught. In 1925 Yiddish schools were permitted.

Rose's family spoke mainly Yiddish and Ukrainian at home. Her father was involved in the synagogue. Her mother associated with other Jews and helped the Jewish poor and elderly.

There were few activities in the shtetl.

In 1928 Rose went to Nyetpopotrosk to attend college, then university in 1934. She finished accounting.

831-1259 Rose worked during the day and attended university at night. She finished in 1937 as a chartered accountant, and worked a couple years in that city.

In 1937 the government sent Rose to Kiev to receive a degree as an accounting instructor.

WWII

At the time, until World War Two, Rose did not notice any anti-semitism. Everything was fine. When the war broke out between Germany and Russia, Rose was in Kiev.

When Germany divided Poland with Russia, the government sent Rose to Lemberg (Lvov), Poland to instruct in accounting. She was there until war broke out between Germany and Russia. Rose had been all over Galicia, before being sent to Lemberg in 1940.

Rose did not notice anti-semitism in the larger population, but she knew the situation was bad for Jews under Germany.

1260-2183 Rose found out from a friend what was happening to the Jews in Poland.

Rose corresponded with her family. One brother was a soldier with the Russians in Latvia. Her mother had died and her father had remarried.

Return to Russia

When the German-Russian war began Rose tried to run away, because of what she heard about the Germans. Friends had advised her to return to her family in Russia. In Poland it would be very difficult for her.

Rose had a son from her first marriage. She took him and ran to her shtetl. She thought she would stay there during the war and return to Lemberg after. But it didn't work out this way.

Bombs were landing on the train as Rose and her son were escaping. There was a big commotion. The first three cars collapsed. Rose was in the fourth car. She and her son escaped through the window. They ran to the forest and hid in a pond. They were very sick afterwards.

When the bombing plane left, the train was repaired. Rose and her son went to the town where her sister lived, but she had moved back to their other siblings.

Rose came to her shtetl. Her brother had a general store. Anti-semitism was very open then. Rose told her father they should leave, but he refused. Many people did not believe the Germans were so bad. Rose's father had done business with Germans and thought they were good. He was 70-years-old and wanted to be buried near his ancestors.

Rose's son was seven. She decided to leave for his sake. Her brother was still working and could not leave without instructions. Children were supposed to be given to the government, to be evacuated to northern Russia. Rose tried to convince her brother's wife, who had two children, to come with her but she wouldn't leave without her husband.

The government had told the people not to leave anything for the Germans. They were to burn the bread and kill the cattle, so the Russians knew it would be a serious war.

2184-3174 Rose went to the train station where she met two cousins who worked for the Committee of Evacuation. They arranged for her to get on a train.

Rose had left her son at her father's while she inquired about the trains. Her cousins went to get him and Rose's brother brought him to the station.

The evacuation was unforgettable. The train was bombed and people were killed. Rose lay on top of her son and broke her finger. They travelled to northern Russia.

Northern Russia

There was a committee finding out who was who and giving out work. Rose had no papers except for her work card from Poland. She was in demand from the committees, and chose to work in the provincial corporation. Her profession was rare, especially for women, and because most men were in the war.

The other refugees did field work or other jobs. The Jews were not use to field work and were upset. Rose reasoned with them that they would have to do this just until the war ended, and it didn't matter as long as they survived.

There was anti-semitism right away.

The government sent Rose to a big town with three hospitals where Rose worked as a chartered accountant. This was in north-central Russia, near Asia. She worked here until the end of the war.

Rose remarried and gave birth to a second child here. Her first husband had been in the army and had disappeared. The same happened to her younger brother. She learned how her other brother was killed.

Rose was married in the Urals because she was afraid of the Gentile community. They let Rose know she was Jewish. Once she acted as a witness in court, and the fact she was Jewish was a factor. Rose lost her confidence and had in mind that she would run away.

If Rose was treated a little badly, the others were treated much worse. When she was evacuated back to Poland, she ran away. Her second husband was Polish.

When they returned to Poland after the war, they were locked in the train cars so the Poles wouldn't drag them off the trains and kill them. At the time, Rose did not know what had happened in Poland. They planned to go to Israel.

Rose was first married in 1930. Her second marriage was in 1941. Her son Phillip was born in 1943. Her oldest son had been born in 1933. Rose gave birth to Philip because she thought it was important that Jewish women have children. At the time she did not know where they would end up. The Germans were already at Stalingrad.

By the beginning of 1945 Rose felt the Russians would win the war. She wanted to have another child. Her son Leonard was born in Germany and had his bris in the place where Hitler use to holiday.

There had been about 12,000 Jews living in Rose's shtetl before the war. After, there were maybe 10 families left, and these families were not intact. Two of Rose's sisters survived. One of them had evacuated with her two children. The other had a husband who was in the army and did not look Jewish. He worked giving out produce and so was able to help his family.

3175-4062 In Rose's shtetl, the intellectuals were the first to be killed. Then the children of the workers were killed. One of Rose's girlfriends was taken away by her former Gentile boyfriend, who refused to find her a place to hide.

Rose had been very assimilated. She had associated with Gentiles and was happy. She could not believe what happened, especially when she found out about the camps.

After the War

Rose and her husband came to Poland in 1946. The government helped them get back, and allowed Poles to take their Russian spouses with them.

Rose and her husband hoped to get to Israel, but it was impossible. The British would not allow Jews in. Instead they ended up in Canada.

They lived in Vienna in 1946-47 and then went to Munich. From there they went to live at a DP camp at the 'place with many lakes, where Hitler use to vacation. Leonard was born here. At the end of 1947 they left for Canada.

Roses's older son was left in Russia because he was under his father's name. A woman from UNRA promised Rose he would be sent to Canada too.

Rose and her husband were chosen for Canada because he worked in the orphanage teaching children to sew.

They lift by military ship from Bremen. Rose was very sick on the ship. They arrived in Halifax. They were happy to be in a free country. There had been many Jews on the ship.

Rose and her husband were processed in Montreal. She didn't care where in Canada they would be sent. Many of the newcomers had relatives meeting them. Rose and her husband had no one. On the train from Halifax to Montreal Rose met a man from Winnipeg whose mother had come from her shtetl. This woman later looked up Rose when she came to Winnipeg. She knew Roses' family well.

Winnipeg

Rose and her family arrived in Winnipeg on January 13, 1948. They were well received by the Jewish Congress.

Not all Gentiles are bad. Many Jews who survived did so because of Gentiles. We must remember that.

Rose and her family lived on Cathedral near Main. She refused charity, and just wanted a job. Then her first husband's family, who lived in Winnipeg, helped her out. Rose's husband got a job right away, but for very low wages. He did piece work, and eventually got more experience and earned more.

Nobody in Winnipeg asked Rose about her experiences. This interview is the first time she is discussing them. She does not like to go back to that time.

Eventually Rose and her husband built a factory together, 'Florida Sportswear'.

4065-4950

Rose was not in the camps. Her worst time was when she travelled from Lvov to the Urals and the train was bombed. She has tried to talk to camp survivors so she can share their pain. She is glad she evacuated when she did. She knows she would have been among the first killed, because she would not have stood back and watched others being mistreated.

In the summer of 1949, UNRA sent Rose's oldest son to Canada. If Rose had said she had a son in Russia she would not have been allowed to leave Russia. The woman from UNRA insisted Rose take her opportunity and go to Canada. The boy would make it there, but if Rose didn't take her opportunity then, there would not be another one. While in Russia, Rose's son could not say he had a mother. By the time the authorities found out, Rose was already in Canada.

Rose learned Yiddish in Winnipeg by reading daily Yiddish newspapers. Once she tried to read her son Phillip an article about children during the war and he made her stop reading. It was too painful for him.

Rose often dreams about the war. She never discusses her experiences with her husband. His were worse.

Rose and her husband started their sportswear factory in 1955. They also had a men's clothing store in East Kildonan, and a corporation. They sold the factory in 1972, and then eventually the store and the building. They were left with the corporation.

Rose's husband is retired. She is semi-retired.

In 1976 Rose worked for Sterling Shoes, setting up a bookkeeping office. In the evening she worked for the family business. This was too difficult, so she left Sterling Shoes.

Rose helped organize the Chanita chapter of Pioneer Women. She is still active in it, but not as much as she was.

Roses' health was affected by her wartime experiences. She suffers arthritis from hiding that time in the pond.

Rose reads a lot. She has five grandchildren. Only Leonard lives in Winnipeg.

Now, with this tape, her sons will hear how Rose fought for her life from the time she finished school at grade seven.

Rose knows German.