HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ROSE FINE

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Date: March 10, 1982

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RF - Rose Fine[1] [interviewee]
JF - Josey G. Fisher, [interviewer]
Date: March 10, 1982

Tape one, side one:

JF: This is an interview with Mrs. Rose Fine, on March 10, 1982, with Josey Fisher. Mrs. Fine, could you tell me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your family?

RF: I was born in 1917 in a small city called Ozorkow [in Poland]. It was not far from the big city of Lodz. My father was a *shochet* [ritual slaughterer], big scholar, and I had a very fine family. We were 10 children—six sisters, four brothers.

JF: Where were you in that family?

RF: I was the seventh of the family. There were five married sisters and one married brother, and the rest, myself and three small brothers who were still single home at the time of the outbreak of the war. I attended public school, Hebrew school.

JF: Could you describe for me your experience in the public school?

RF: Well, we felt anti-Semitism, not only in the school, but all over, as it was the way of our living in this country. Jews were not allowed to have any public positions, fireman or policeman or bus driver, no real legitimate big factory worker, so...

JF: You mean they were not allowed to function in those jobs?

RF: No, they were not paid, not in the big places. [unclear] where people made a good living, Jews were not allowed. That's why they were forced to find themselves like home jobs, like home tailors, home shoemakers. Of course, the majority of people were not very well off. There was a small amount of very rich people, a little bit amount of middle class people, and I guess the majority were not too comfortable.

JF: About what part of your town was Jewish, do you think?

RF: It was a small part. The Jews were concentrated in the middle of the city, while the rest of the city which was built 10, 15 years before they were started to build; these little houses, like private houses, were built by the people that had those big jobs in those factories. When Friday came and they got their pay, just like here, and they could count on it, where a Jew, if he finished a job, which was usually the way, I guess he never got paid on time, and then after, if he got after three months a check, and it was due two months after, and he needed the money, he went to the person to get the check. He also lost on that, because the one that was giving him the money also took a percentage of this check. So all around, it was a very hard, difficult country to live in.

JF: The middleman took out something from the check that the Jewish man got.

[1]née Hollendar.

RF: Of course, because this was his trade. He had the money, he did you the favor, and paid you the money before the time, so he also took a big chunk.

JF: The Jews were concentrated in the center of the town?

RF: Almost.

JF: Was this an old section of the city?

RF: Not necessarily. I wouldn't say it. It was the place, it was called like, the middle city. Let's call it the middle city. It wasn't necessarily an older section, but the middle of the city.

JF: And did non-Jews shop in that area, or was it primarily Jewish trade and Jewish shops?

RF: No, not primarily. We shopped together. It wasn't a isolation like here, a ghetto. No, gentiles came to our stores; they came to Jewish tailors; they came to Jewish shoemakers. Anything else you want to ask me?

JF: You were in a public school with non-Jews. Did you have friends who were non-Jewish?

RF: I personally, because I came from a strictly Orthodox home, did not very closely associate with gentile people.

JF: Was that your choice, or was that the choice of your parents?

RF: No, we grew up that way. See, it wasn't because I hated her or she hated me. It was just that we didn't have that much in common in daily life, except the school, that she could become my personal friend.

JF: So your personal friends were people who came from homes that were similar to yours?

RF: That's correct. Jewish people.

JF: And can you tell me about your religious upbringing, given your father's position?

RF: We were very religious. It was a religious home, and we were religious people.

JF: Did you have schooling for the religion?

RF: Yes. I went to a Hebrew school. I went to a strictly Orthodox Hebrew school.

JF: And can you describe what kind of education?

RF: Only Jewish girls. It was an only-girls school. It was so Orthodox that no boys and girls were together. The boys had the Talmud Torah and [unclear], and we had the Beth Jacob. It was a strictly Orthodox girls school.

JF: And how many days a week did you go?

RF: We went after school, after our public school.

JF: How many days a week did you go?

RF: Let's say two, three hours after school. I don't remember. Maybe Friday not, because it was a short day. It's so many years, I don't remember. Maybe Friday out of

school, because we were preparing for *Shabbos*, but otherwise I think we went a whole week.

JF: Can you tell me any more about your parents' involvement at this time in the town, either with Jewish organizations, or even non-Jewish...

RF: Yes, my father belonged to *Agudas Yisrael*. This was extreme Orthodox, being of Orthodoxy. My father was a big scholar, a very fine man. My mother was an *eshes chayil* [a woman of valor]; they don't come today in this caliber. And my brothers and sisters, of course were very fine. My sisters wore wigs, and strictly Orthodox, Orthodox homes. This would be my background. Anything else?

JF: Not much, unless you can think of it. Did any of the men in your family ever serve in the National Army in Poland?

RF: No. May I say that they did everything not to. The reason is because there was a very difficult problem to get kosher food in the army, and they did everything not to do it. And none of them was serving, because in my family there was only one brother that was at the age, because the other three were younger than me, and so were not at military age. But the one, or my brothers-in-law, never.

JF: How were they able to get out of it?

RF: They would fast and on diet for many, many weeks to get to the point where their weight was not acceptable. That's how I remember it, but I also remember many people saying that they would pull teeth, or something like that. Now this is what I heard as a young girl. Or they would make themselves deaf in one ear. I don't know why, don't ask me. But with my family, this was the reason. And with other ones, I guess with all religious people, this was the reason.

JF: Can you tell me when the news of the Nazi takeover in Germany first affected you?

RF: Me personally, there was talking, politics, people were standing on the corners and talking, and listened to the radio. It all began with the Crystal Night; it began in Germany, but seemed never, never to enter anybody's imagination. Nobody could foresee, first of all, what would happen, because no human being could think that a human being can do to somebody whatever they did; and, as a matter of fact, this summer, my father and mother lived in a...at summertimes we rented in the forest a room or two, and the family went for the summer to this forest, and on this particular Friday when the war broke out, I had...my youngest brother-in-law was then doing my father's job already, helping. So we got up 5:00 in the morning, and I went with him to town. He was supposed to go to the slaughterhouse, and I was supposed to shop for *Shabbos*, and while we were walking, we heard the planes coming. And from the houses, people were saying: "Lay down, lay down!" So we laid down, and when they passed, we went. And when we got to the city there was already a big...the houses were closed, and policemen were standing outside, and the people were hiding. We felt already the war.

JF: Are you talking of the invasion then?

RF: Friday, it was September 9, and it was already a big...people ran to the stores, and bought whatever they could, and I asked my brother-in-law what to do, and he said, "Take a horse and a buggy and go back and bring Papa and Mama and the children back." So this is what I did, and my father said, "No, it's better, I think during a situation like this, it will be better up in the forest."

JF: Had your parents suspected that this might happen, before?

RF: Not all of a sudden, no. We didn't think it's so close.

JF: The invasion of Poland?

RF: No. Never, we never did. It was something that shocked us, shocked us. But my father said, "No, we'll stay in the forest. I think at a time like this it will be better here." And this is a *Kapitel* [chapter] for itself. It was a terrible tragedy; it was heartbreaking and soul-breaking and fortune-breaking and family-breaking and mind-breaking, and life-breaking, and it was the pits. What can I tell you? It's a long, long story. What do you want me to say?

JF: Can you describe, continue to describe, in as much detail as you can, what happened after you decided to stay in the forest?

RF: Yes, this is a very nice chapter. Anyway, as it was shortly before Rosh Hashonah [Jewish New Year], and while the Germans were coming, we were sitting there in this house, and my brother-in-law wore a black beard, and my father was laying in bed, and we went out to a well for water. Before that, there was like a position, because during the night we heard shots and shooting and shouting, and shouting and shooting but while were [what we're? -ed.] in, we didn't know what. It seems that was a position, and the Poles went away, or they ran away. But I went out with my brother-in-law for water. All of a sudden, three horsemen, Germans, came around, and one took out a gun, and pointed it at my brother-in-law. I can see the hole. He said, "*Wo sind die Polnish Soldaten*?" That means, "Where are the Polish soldiers?" So he was scared; of course, he couldn't talk. So I said, "I don't know where they are. They were here but they left." And again he said it, "*Wo sind die Polnish Soldaten*?" I said, "I really don't know. We knew they were here, but they are away now." So he said, "Show me the way to Lodz, to the big city." So I said, "I guess this will be the way." He put the gun back, and he said, "*Geht, geht, Ihr seit wohl Juden*," "Go, go, you are probably Jews." And we went in, and from inside they looked out and saw what was happening. I tell you, I've seen the hole of that gun pointing to my brother-in-law's head. Anyway, then they started to come to look for ammunition. We didn't hide ammunition. Which Jew had ammunition to hide? But they came very tired, and they were full of sand. They must have come from some kind of position, some of those Germans, looking tired and exhausted. And my father was laying on the bed, and saw what wa-.... They asked him if we had any ammunition, or I don't remember what they asked, and they said, "What's wrong with him?" So we said, "This is our father. He is sick." So he said, "If he is sick, why can't we shot him?" So we children made a wall, like

this, and said, "If you want to shoot, shoot us." My father's face was yellow; I can tell you. Anyway, I guess after Rosh Hashonah...

JF: At that point, did the Germans leave?

RF: Yes, they left. They didn't do no harm to the people there, no. And we left after Rosh Hashonah, maybe after Yom Kippur, I don't remember exactly, and we went home. My father was already ahead like a truck driver. The first Saturday they came in, and between the ones that came in was a boy; his father was a pastor in the German church. One sat with me; I sat in school here, and he sat behind. Many times they played cards, you know like I hid them. And he was already in that black S.S. uniform, and on the Sabbath, he cut my father's beard. So my father said, "I'm not crying because it is *Shabbos* and you are cutting my heard. I'm crying because for the first time in my life, my beard sees the scissors or a knife, and on *Shabbos*." Because everything they did, they did on the Holy Days and *Shabbos*, to break you with your spirit together. And then, things settled down. We had to leave our house, and we moved in with a friend.

JF: Why did you have to leave your house?

RF: Because Germans moved in to the nice houses. So we moved in with our friends...

JF: German who?

RF: Germans, the poorer Germans from the city moved into houses. Then we had to move, not in the front, but only in the back, because we were not allowed to walk on the street, only in the back.

JF: These were Germans who were already living in Poland?

RF: *Volksdeutsche*.

JF: Oh, these were *Volksdeutsche*.

RF: You were not allowed to walk on the street. You had to walk in the back. And our children, two boys, there was no money, because when you had a little money it was in the bank, and nobody would give it back. And my father had asthma. So our children went to work in a lumber. They brought a little of that thing to burn in the oven, the saw dust, it's called, to burn in the oven. It was bad; it was very bad.

JF: And was food rationed during this time?

RF: Oh yes, it was already rationed. While we lived so close, so many people, typhus started to come around. Anyway, before this, in 1941, my father died of a broken heart. He could not make...my father died of a broken heart. And my mother was left at 49 years old.

JF: Your father was a young man?

RF: My father was older than my mother. My mother was his second wife. Then typhus started to spread up, because we didn't have so much soap, and we lived together, and not enough food.

JF: At the time you are talking about, were only Jews in the area that you were moved into?

RF: No, no, no. And now, the Germans found a house a little bit out of the city, and they called it a hospital. It was isolated, and this was supposed to be the place where they intended to make the ghetto. So while they were making, building the ghetto, they put this house and made out of it a hospital. And everybody that was stroken [sic] by the sickness was taken to this hospital. My father was for a long time asthma sick, and I was the one that made my father a needle in the vein, and in the flesh. And a friend of my father, that knew that, called me and said I should go into that hospital and help the people as much as I can. There was no Lysol even to wash the hands. Not a white apron. No doctor. There was only one doctor from our city, Mr. Goldstein, that was studying in Paris, but the [unclear] interrupted his study because he had to come back while the war started.

JF: So there was one Jewish doctor.

RF: Only Jewish doctor. And then, after a short while, a Dr. Moskowicz came; he was from Germany, I think from Berlin. And these two doctors were taking care of these people.

JF: Where was the ghetto area that you are describing?

RF: It was in, a little bit off our city...where my home was, of course, yes. Also, once there was a sick person in the city, the other people of the family were in an isolation house. Because the Germans were very much afraid of typhus.

JF: When they were building the ghetto, did they actually build a wall...

RF: No, they didn't build a ghetto. They took a certain street, two, three streets, and the houses. They took the Poles out, and emptied the houses, and one nice Friday, they took all the people, from whoever was left in the city, and they brought them into the ghetto.

JF: How many Jews do you think were in the ghetto in your town?

RF: I don't know. All I know is before even this, a couple weeks before, on a Friday night, while we were still in the city, everybody had to come out of their houses, women, children, sick, healthy, and they took us on...I was in the hospital at the time...and they took us on horses and wagons, and whoever they could, they took, put away, and the rest was left in the houses, and after two or three weeks, they came into the ghetto. And that was the end of the city.

JF: Explain that to me. They took the people, including you...

RF: No, I was working in the hospital, but my mother and my brothers were already in. My two brothers, the youngest, were already in a labor camp. But my mother and the youngest boy, he was 13 years old, one Friday they came in, and they rang a bell, like, and everybody had to come out of the houses. So, whoever they could, they took away, and whoever was left went back to the houses.

JF: And where did they take these people? Did you ever find out?

RF: My mother was taken to Chelmno, with my 13-year-old brother, with two of my sisters, and the small children, and they were exterminated there.

JF: So this is before the ghetto was actually formed?

RF: This was before the ghetto was formed, right. To the ghetto went many only privileged, the younger ones, healthier ones, the ones that they thought that they would be able to use after the war for their benefit, which they did.

JF: So was there anyone else left at home besides you, after this...

RF: In the ghetto I was with a brother-in-law and sister. Her two children went already with my mother, with a niece. Her parents were also, went already at that time. She was young. She lives now in some other section of Philadelphia. This is the only niece I have left from the whole family. And then the city was *judenrein*, Jewish-clean, and the ones that were left were concentrated in the ghetto.

JF: This happened in 1941, this deportation?

RF: 1941.

JF: And then the formation of the ghetto?

RF: Right.

JF: And your father had died?

RF: My father was gone, and this Friday, when they made the people come out, I heard in the ghetto what was going on, and my mother ran through the back field, and came to the door of the ghetto, but they were not allowed to open it.

JF: Wait a minute. This was before the deportation?

RF: Before deportation. The first deportation.

JF: There was a deportation before the one where your mother was taken?

RF: This is the first deportation. So I was in the hospital, and my mother ran in the back side, through the field to the ghetto, but they were not allowed to open the ghetto doors, because they were afraid that the people would hide. So I ran out of the hospital, and the man at the gate was Mr. Dreihomen, and I said, "Look, with all I do here, I want my mother to be let in."

JF: She came to the door of the hospital?

RF: Of the ghetto.

JF: The hospital was in the ghetto?

RF: Yes. And they didn't open the door, not the door, but the gate. And I said, "Mr. Dreihomen, for all I do, I want my mother here." Anyway, my mother was there maybe two weeks, maybe three weeks, when they took us all out and they stamped us, A or B.

JF: Your mother was let in?

RF: Yes.

JF: And your little brother was also...there,-...

RF: My thirteen-year-old brother.

JF: In the hospital, in the ghetto for a couple of weeks?

RF: Right. In this ghetto my sister, Teicha [?] lived with her husband. Her two children went away from there one day already.

JF: So some of the Jews were already in the ghetto area, but not all of them. It had not been totally filled at that point.

RF: Right. Now listen to me. My mother was there two, three weeks, and they came to stamp us, like an "A" or a "B."

JF: What did that mean?

RF: In the beginning we didn't know. "A" was all right. You would be all right for work. So, one day, they took us out again, everybody on the place [Platz, town square]. There were small children, infants, because people had children no matter what. We were standing on the place around, and he said, "*Krankenschwester*, Nurse, come over!" I had to take a child from a mother. And I said, "I don't want to do it myself. There is another one...let her do it." I felt like... Anyway, all the sick people, the small children, had to go into the hospital, and the rest went back to the ghetto. Three days, not a little water for the children, they laid there, they cried themselves to sleep, they got up, cried themselves to sleep, until...

JF: Until they died?

RF: Until they died.

JF: Was anything actually ever done to them? Were they ever poisoned in any way?

RF: No, no, no. I don't know. They were taken, they were taken away after a while. After a while they were taken away. They came with *Panzer* [armor-plated] trucks, very big military trucks, closed. And when they opened the door, you could smell chloroform. And they threw the people in, and away they went.

JF: These were the ones who had not yet died?

RF: No, they were the sick, the typhoid people, old people. As a matter of fact, there was in a small village behind our city. They brought old people from this village. They also brought them there.

JF: But before they went on these trucks, they did not feed them in the hospital for several days?

RF: No. Three days was nobody was allowed, it was called a *Sperre* [quarantine]; nobody was allowed to go out of the house for three days.

JF: And many of them died in the hospital?

RF: Yes, children, typhoid people died, there was like a spot typhoid. They died there.

JF: And the people who lived through that period of time were put on the trucks?

RF: Right. One day, on March 5, I remember exactly the day...

JF: This was what year now?

RF: 1941. One March 5, in the morning, I had night duty, and it was 6:00 in the morning. It was cold outside, frost...European frost. I remember the names of the people, many of them that were there, Surje Breitbart, [unclear], a daughter, Gebkowitch, [unclear],

she was the daughter-in-law to the rich Prijonowskis; they were stricken with typhoid. I left 6:00, and another nurse came in to release me. My brother-in-law lived from the hospital like across the street in a room, and I came in and I had a hot cup of tea, and all of a sudden she said, "[unclear], come quick." And in front of the hospital there were, I don't remember how many there were, high wagons with horses. And the German said, I went in and he said that we should dress the people and bring them out. And there were like Jewish policemen, a sanitary committee it was called, and they were also there. So I said to them, "Go to the family. Let them give me a shirt or a coat; you cannot take out naked people."

JF: This was everyone in the hospital they wanted to take out?

RF: Right. But the relatives of these typhoid-stricken people were waiting already outside to be taken with them. They were in an isolation house, the relatives. So, while they were preparing the sick people, they stood already in line. So I didn't have anything to put on those people, because they didn't have anything either. And these people were taken out, I swear to you, on the ice, barefooted, put on these wagons with straw.

Tape one, side two:

JF: This is tape 1, side 2, of an interview with Mrs. Rose Fine.

RF: My brother-in-law lived like across the street, where I lived with him in the ghetto. He also had the typhoid. Each typhoid case had to be reported. But while I worked in the hospital, the doctors did me a favor, and we kept him without reporting. Before he was really not completely out of it, one nice day, they called us out, because it was called an *Appell*, appeal, *Appell* [roll call].

JF: This is before or after, you were talking about the hospital being cleared?

RF: No, after. I have another clearing-out also.

JF: Could you finish telling me about what happened after the people were taken out of the hospital? You yourself felt that you were also going to be taken.

RF: That's right, that's 100%. But while the last wagon moved away, and he went after, I went back to my brother-in-law's house, and there I fainted. Like a let-down. In this brother-in-law's house I lived, and this brother-in-law had typhoid. We hid it because I did so much for the people, the doctor allowed this case to be hidden. One nice morning, they called us out, and we had to walk in fives for two miles, beyond the city, where the electric building that supplied the city with electricity was standing...

JF: Who is this who had to leave?

RF: All the Jews.

JF: All the Jews in the ghetto?

RF: In the ghetto, yes. And when we arrived at this place, there were ten ropes prepared for ten people to be hung, and there, around and around, benches for the dignities [sic] to come to observe the beautiful scenery.

JF: These were the dignitaries of the town, or Germans?

RF: No, Germans, military and town. Ten people from our city were brought out, their hands behind their backs. The crimes, one boy, his name was Hooser [?], he had parents a half a mile out of the city, and he was not supposed to cross the border, but he wanted to see his father and mother, and one time they caught him. This was the crime that he was hung. One came from the ghetto, Kutno, in another city, who has relatives in our town, and they caught him there...

JF: You mean coming into your ghetto to see his family?

RF: Right. And he was hung. And one father of six children, his name was Hosan [?]. I went to school with one of his daughters. His wife and children had to look, they couldn't look down. They had to look and see how their father was hung, because the crime was, he was a watchman over the isolation house of the families that had typhoid. In this house was a very rich lady, isolated, and she paid a lot of money to the German that was watching. And while the German looked away, no excuse me, while there was a letter put to the window to this house, and she went down with her son, and she disappeared from

the ghetto, while the German looked away. And the Jew was punished for this crime by being hung.

JF: Because he was supposed to be watching...

RF: Right. And after this beautiful ceremony, we went home, back to the ghetto.

JF: This was in the early days of the ghetto?

RF: Right. Maybe not early, I don't remember exactly when. Well, after a while, one night, they called us out; it was 5:00, and we knew it was, we felt already it was the last trip. So, somebody had a little saccharin, a little barley, a piece of bread, and we had this in a bag. And while we were standing and waiting to be taken away, before they said that we should put the little packages down, the Polish neighbors were waiting outside the gate for us to be taken, that they should take the little bit of poor, little measly bite that we left.

JF: You were being deported at this time?

RF: To the Lodzer Ghetto, to the big ghetto.

JF: Now, after the emptying of the hospital that you described before, were you able to continue to work in the hospital?

RF: Yes, I did, I did, I did.

JF: Were people still being brought in?

RF: Yes. People that had from too little vitamins, they had holes in their feet, you know, so the doctor made all kinds of, whatever we could help them with, a bandage, or for big heart problems we had some digitalis, with this we healed. So whatever we had...

JF: You had a little bit of medicine?

RF: A little bit here, a little bit there, you know.

JF: And then how long were you in the ghetto in your own town?

RF: In my own town, maybe a year. And then...

JF: And about how many people do you think were left to be taken to Lodz?

RF: Not many. We had to wait until 2:00 in the night because one Mr. Friedman was blind, so they shot him, and some people had to take him to the cemetery to be buried. And they took us to the Lodz Ghetto.

JF: Let me ask you a question. You still had a Jewish cemetery that you were allowed...

RF: In the city was a cemetery, in our city was the cemetery.

JF: You were still allowed to bury the dead?

RF: This Mr. Friedman was buried in the cemetery, yes.

JF: Was this allowed, for instance, for the people who were hung, or other people who died in the hospital? Were you able to have free access to the cemetery?

RF: I don't remember. My father was buried in the cemetery. I don't remember. I guess.

JF: Was there a *Judenrat*, was there a council in your ghetto?

RF: Yes, there was, but there was a Mr. Bartusky, a lawyer, a very fine, refined man. Nothing wrong, nothing bad to say about him, no.

JF: What did the Nazis ask of the *Judenrat*?

RF: The *Judenrat*? Like, they wanted young men, the transfer of young men to be taken to work, which two of my brothers went, and let's say, when the people were hung, he had to say, "This was done because the people did not observe the German law. And whoever will do that, this is going to be their end. That's how the end is going to look."

JF: Who had to say this?

RF: Mr....

JF: The head of the *Judenrat* had to explain why these people were being punished?

RF: Yes, that's right.

JF: Did you feel that he was a just man?

RF: 100%. There was a little some, let me tell you, at a time like this, there is such a saying in Polish, "[unclear]," "Through dead bodies to your life." Life is very precious to people, and many people will go through dead people to the destination to save their lives. But nothing outstanding that I could say, not because I am Jewish, or because the people are from my city. But nothing like in the Lodz Ghetto, like in the camps, like in Auschwitz, nothing like that.

JF: What about the Jewish police that you mentioned before?

RF: There's nothing that I can point that they did bad. They wanted people, and they had to provide the people. Look, there's nothing I can say, but nothing outstanding that I could point at these people that were bad; they did bad things.

JF: Were they helpful to you?

RF: They didn't have reasons to be helpful, or ways to be helpful, or means to be helpful; no.

JF: So this was about 1942 then?

RF: 1942, we went to the Lodz Ghetto.

JF: And how were you deported to Lodz?

RF: In trolley cars. At two in the night you were taken to trolley cars, and we were taken to Lodz. It wasn't long, like maybe three quarters of an hour, or so. We arrived in the middle of the night.

JF: There was a trolley line that went to Lodz from your town?

RF: Yes. And when I arrived, I remember, our city was a small city, and in Lodz in the ghetto there were people already for two years, starving. So while we were marching to our certain destination, I've seen people looking out of the window when they heard us walking, like you would take people out of caskets. This was the first time I met, we were not in that small city, we were not that very much worn out like they. And they took us to a, something like a jail, or something like that, I remember.

JF: Did you know where you were going?

RF: No, nobody knew, no. When we arrived, we stood in a line, and out came Bubba, that was his name, I think, Bubba. He was the one that was above...for the Lodz Ghetto, and he said, "Anything anybody has—gold, silver, whatever you have—I want you to know we are taking you now into a place where we are going to x-ray you, and whatever we find on you that you didn't give away, you are going to be shot!" And there were boxes standing, and whatever somebody had, they threw it in, they threw it in. Anyway, they took us to a place where there was a jail or a school; I don't remember, it was such a long time ago. I don't remember. Anyway, in the morning, people came and they located us into a little house, and a little room, five people in a room, six people in a room, seven people in a room, and then the Lodz Ghetto began.

JF: Who were you with in your family at this point? Was there anyone with you from your family?

RF: My niece was, my brother-in-law and my sister. And I was there until 1944, August.

JF: Can you describe as much as you can about your experience in Lodz?

RF: It was a terrible experience. I was in school. I was very good in Polish. The language Polish I was excellent in. When I arrived, I went to a place, it was called *Arbeit Einsatz* [labor pool], where you were looking for work. So they sent me to dig graves in the cemetery, dig graves in cemetery. Well, what can I tell you? People like having a stick in a sheet, and inside was laying the person, big as that. We were digging, digging, every three or four days, and I've seen that I am not going to make it. I am going to die. The wife of the president, Rumkowski[2], was a lawyer, a very educated person. I wrote a letter to her, and I told her that I am by myself, I don't have anybody, and I was taken to this kind of a job, and I am heartbroken, I cannot make it. If it's possible, she should give me a decent job. And nobody had a way to go to her. I had a package of cigarettes, and there was a boy that was like a bus boy. I gave him these cigarettes, and I said, "Look, I don't want this secretary,"—Miss Hychevage [?] was her name; "I want this letter to go straight to Mrs. Rumkowski." Eight early in the morning, somebody knocked at the door, and it was him. She made me an appointment that I should come to her office. So I came in; it was a beautiful office. She was already in mourning; it was black... She married this man because she had a father and a brother that she wanted to save, because he was president, and of course, they lived nice and good, so she married him in order to save, you know, so they could live in a better conditions, but they died anyway. When I saw her she was in black.

JF: They were deported, or they died in the ghetto?

RF: They were deported to Auschwitz; no, they died in the ghetto. Her father and brother died in the ghetto, died because of sickness. She was deported to Auschwitz, with Rumkowski.

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[2]Chaim Mordechai Rumkowski, appointed "Elder of the Jews" in Lodz Ghetto. -ed.

JF: But she married Rumkowski at that time for that reason?

RF: Right, right. And we sat, a very nice lady, and we spoke, we spoke, and she directed me to a kitchen. A job like this, you know, who could get, in the ghetto, could have it, a wife of a big manufacturer, a very known person. Anyway I was lucky enough to get a job like that.

JF: Was she a young woman?

RF: Yes, young, very intelligent, extremely passionate [personable?] and sensitive and intelligent. She wore a big diamond, I seen on her finger, I remember like now. A very fine person. And who was I to her that she should, you know, and once, after a long while working there, and what I did for people at that time, God should pay me my old age, I hope. I didn't do it for any work, but I hope He will pay me for it. And one day, a man came in, he was supposed to be Rumkowski's brother, and he made like a cleaning. He took some people out. They had more important people to put in, and I was out. So, it was summer, and they lived in a Marsiny [?], it was called, in a summer place. So I was waiting at the gate while he and her came out in a beautiful black carriage with horses, and I threw my letter—because he didn't let the carriage stop—I threw my letter on her lap, like passing by, and I was taken back. And until the end of the, the liquidation of the ghetto, I worked in that kitchen.

JF: The summer home that they were in, was this outside the ghetto? Or part of the ghetto?

RF: No in the ghetto, part of the ghetto.

JF: And it was removed from a congested area?

RF: No. The ghetto was big. The ghetto was very big. But they lived there I guess during the summer. And I wanted to let her know that they eliminated me, and while they were going out, and he didn't want to stop, I threw the letter, and sure enough she took it. In the liquidation of the ghetto, I was, until I was taken, and I was going to Auschwitz, I was working in the kitchen.

JF: What did you know of Rumkowski himself, and the workings of that man?

RF: Not much. You know why, because everybody was busy with the piece of potato, waiting in lines for the frozen potato, and you know, waiting in line for the gas, because if you had a gas burner, for the time, for half an hour, you were waiting and praying that the water should boil until that time, you were so...I just told you, that the desire to live is very strong in a person. Nothing bothered you there. You survive, think, this was the main, main, main...I guess it's human nature.

JF: What details can you give me about the kitchen, as far as what was gotten, and how you made it?

RF: Let's say, the president was a big Mr. Saida. He was a very big, must have been a big man in the ghetto, not in the ghetto, but in Lodz. Otherwise he wouldn't get a position like this. And all the people that were there were privileged people, no doubt about it. There was a cook, and there were factories, people working, and 12:00 we took our big

things and we wheeled them there, and dumped them out in big pots, and with a certain measure, everybody came in, and had a ticket, and got a soup. The piece of potato that was in that soup was to be found, or not to be found, believe me. The way the men stood and looked at the piece of potato with the spoon. That's how, what can I tell you.

JF: This is primarily what you were cooking, potato soup?

RF: Water, and potato soup, and cabbage, and when we received some bones, let's say, from a horse or whatever it was, it was cooking the whole night, because horse meat takes very long. The president was there all night. The meat was taken by the president and by the cook, and we were taken to one separate room, and we were taking the meat off the bones, and believe me, some went in my pocket, and in this pocket, and what the person outside saw was a plain, clean bone, all right.

JF: None of that meat got into the soup itself? Not too much?

RF: Let's say no. We had a man that was working in that factory, and of course, they were privileged, and they came, the potatoes came from the bottom and taken to [unclear]. And the workers stood and said, "Where are the potatoes?" And he said—I remember his name, but I don't want to mention it—he said, "Eat stones!" But he had already the potatoes! Anyway, August 1942, I went to Auschwitz.

JF: August 1942?

RF: No, '44. I went to Auschwitz.

JF: Before we get to Auschwitz, is there anything else that you can tell me about Lodz and the experiences you had there, or what you observed, about the treatment of the Jews?

RF: It was terrible. It was terrible. I used to make needles [give injections]. As I told you about my father. When I went from the ghetto, there was a little box, and I had the needle there, and the things there, because we had to cook it in a spoon of water...

JF: You're talking about a syringe?

RF: Yes. I had it with me. So while I was in the ghetto, a man came to me and said, "Rushka," is my name, he remembered that I made needles, and he said, "Please do me a favor. My wife is very sick. I have the thing, I have the medicine, just come and do it for me." So we went to the back, and all the fences were off, because people took them to burn in their houses, you know, to heat the houses. I passed by, and through a window I saw a man laying there. I don't know how long he was dead, but he was half eaten by the flies, half eaten by the flies. What other experience should I tell you?

JF: Tell me what you can about the children. Was there any organization that you knew of to teach them? To keep them together? To fortify them in any way?

RF: All I know that you could see them. They were dressed in rags, and they were like, like, like dead. They grew up before their age.

JF: Was there any teaching?

RF: I don't remember.

JF: Was there any religious activity?

RF: I don't remember.

JF: Did you celebrate any of the traditional observances?

RF: As much as I could, that is very little.

JF: Were you aware of having contact with a rabbi, or anything?

RF: I had a brother-in-law, and they were also hidden themselves; they also watched their skin. I had one brother-in-law that was in the ghetto that, if you didn't go to work, you didn't receive that soup. So on *Shabbos*, my brother-in-law did not work, and he didn't have the soup. That's what you had to sacrifice.

JF: You said that you don't remember any kind of religious observance on a group scale, and you did what you could personally?

RF: That's right.

JF: Are there any other details...

RF: The ghetto was a terrible experience, but it's nothing to begin with, and nothing to start with. It was terrible. People were dying like flies. Death was a consolation, because you saw them with feet like that, and with stomachs like that, and eyes like that. And the *shmattes* that they had, the rags, were worn out already, through the years like rags. It was terrible.

JF: Was there a difference socially among the people in the ghetto? Were certain people who were wealthier have a different position in the ghetto than the poorer people?

RF: Yes. People that had, let's say, wealth, could still buy a piece of bread. People sold, or some people had privileged jobs there. They used to have more food and so. If you had, there were times that you could better yourself. But not many had.

JF: Were you aware of what was going on outside the ghetto?

RF: No, no.

JF: There was no communication from outside?

RF: None whatsoever.

JF: Did you know about what was going on in the concentration camps?

RF: No, I didn't. I had no idea.

JF: You thought that was as bad as it was going to get?

RF: No, no.

JF: The Lodz Ghetto?

RF: No.

JF: What did you think was going to happen?

RF: Nobody knew, nobody. This is beyond human imagination. Nobody knew, nobody. Nobody could ever, ever think of something like that.

JF: Did you have any contact with the Polish population at the time that you were in Lodz?

RF: No.

JF: Just the Germans?

RF: No Polish, no. This was a closed ghetto. Closed, closed ghetto.

JF: Were you aware of anybody else who had any contact with the Poles who might have tried to help?

RF: No, I wasn't. I came from a city where no Pole helped a Jew. There were in other cities people who helped, single people. But in my city, nobody helped.

JF: In your own hometown?

RF: No.

JF: And also not in Lodz?

RF: Lodz, I don't know. I came to the ghetto, so I didn't have any contact with nobody but Jews.

JF: And was there a difference between your own ghetto police and those that you found in Lodz, the Jewish police?

RF: I didn't have much contact. I went my way.

JF: You were working how many hours a day in the kitchen?

RF: I don't remember.

JF: And was there any other kind of activity...

RF: I had, don't forget I had a very privileged job. I was between the very privileged ones.

JF: Was there any other activity for you outside of that?

RF: No.

JF: Was there anything that you found, any group of people that you found?

RF: No. We were just people, we were just happy enough to rest your bones and get up in the morning.

JF: And your other family members, your brother-in-law, and sister, they were also working?

RF: Yes, yes, yes. Everybody was working.

JF: So now you are telling me about the deportation in 1944.

RF: 1944, that was the deportation. I went almost with the last, when the hospital was transferred to Auschwitz, I went. Almost the last day, I left the ghetto.

JF: Did you know at that point where the other transports had gone?

RF: No, I didn't. I had no idea.

JF: Was your family still with you, or had they been already evacuated?

RF: Only one person...it was impossible to hide, it was impossible to hide already, because there were dogs after us, and if you would be hidden there, in the basement...one day I was in the basement, and we heard them walking, the Germans, looking in the houses. One morning, across the street, the door was open, the people were gone in the middle of the night, so you went. And the day when I went, there were already placards on the street that anybody who was to be deported would be shot if they didn't go. So we took our things, and we went to the station. Went to the station, went on the famous wagons, you know, and then we were taken to Auschwitz.

JF: When you say the famous wagons, you are referring to the closed cars?

RF: The closed cars, right.

JF: And what do you remember about that trip? How long was it, and what...

RF: We arrived 4:00 in the morning...

JF: You had started out at when?

RF: I don't remember. Anyway, when we arrived, it was raining, and we were standing on the side. While we were coming down from the train, the Germans stood there and they said, "Women separate, men separate!" And from far away we heard cling, cling, cling, and we would see people like from a Byberry's [mental institution in Northeast Philadelphia]—no hair, no shoes, run out from houses, and about 7:00 they opened the wagons, we came down, men separate, women separate, and I was taken to a shower...

JF: The people that were running down when the bell rang, were who?

RF: They were the people in the barracks.

JF: They came to see...this was for the...

RF: No, they went out for the water, like for the little coffee, for the little...they were counting you. You had to stay. Twice a day you had a counting. So at 5:00 they rang, the people came out, and they counted you.

JF: And you could see this from the train?

RF: I've seen it, but I didn't understand what it was. So we came down from the train, and they took us to a shower.

JF: Was there any selection before the shower, when you got off the train? Was there any kind of division?

RF: Yes, certainly, certainly.

JF: There was a selection immediately. Were you still with any of your family when you were taken at that point?

RF: No, I was already alone. Well, my mother wasn't there anymore, of course, and nobody from my family. I was alone. My sister, my brother-in-law, and my niece went to Auschwitz a day before I went, and then after the selection, we were taken to out bath. We were undressed on this side, took a bath, and went out the other side. On the other side there stood a table with some dresses, and a dress was thrown to you. I had a black dress, a long black dress.

JF: These were regular civilian clothes?

RF: This was clothes that were taken from the people that they exterminated. She threw a dress, I had a black dress. And from there we were taken to a barrack. And I was in Auschwitz eight days. After the eighth day...

JF: During that eight days, what was your daily pattern like?

RF: My daily pattern, we received in the morning, we had to go for water, and water and leaves, and this was the breakfast.

JF: What did you do with the water and leaves?

RF: Drink it. This was a drink.

JF: You would cook the leaves in the water?

RF: No, it was hot. It was in hot pots, water and leaves, I don't know, whatever it was. And then they brought in soup, and we drank from one pot...