

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Romualda Segin

RG-50.473*0244

English

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00:26 Interviewer: Good afternoon.

00:28 Interviewee: Good afternoon

00:29 Interviewer: First, I would like to ask you to introduce yourself. What are your first name and your last name?

00:35 Interviewee: My name is Romualda. My last name is Segin.

00:41 Interviewer: Tell me please in what year were you born?

00:44 Interviewee: In 1925.

00:47 Interviewer: And where?

00:48 Interviewee: In Rostov-on-Don.

00:51 Interviewer: Pani Romualda, we met few months ago and you shared your memories about the beginning of the War in Rostov-on-Don with us. We returned to record those memories. I am asking you to recall one more time how has the life changed in Rostov-on-Don when the war started, or rather when the German occupation took place.

01:24 Interviewee: The War started in Russia in 1941, on June 22. It was Sunday. Kiev was bombed at that time and the war started without any warning. And evacuation right away... Not evacuation, but mobilization was taking place, everyone was redeployed. Well, I stayed in Rostov. I was 15 years old when the war started. Very soon, in autumn, the Germans were already in Taganrog. And Taganrog is by the Azov Sea; it was 75 km from us. They wanted to strengthen their forces there in Taganrog and for that they needed to capture Rostov so that nobody hindered them. At that time, we -- Russian forces, Soviet, left Rostov without striking a blow, left at night. And in the morning we saw that Germans were in Rostov already. That was what we saw. As soon as they, Germans, entered the city -- they did not stay here for a long time, maybe a week or so -- they started from Jews right away. They put up a notice that Jews should have gathered in ghetto. Besides that, there were other notices that for a one killed soldier a hundred of residents would be killed, one hundred of residents. For one officer -- 150 people would be killed. So that how it was. That week we somehow did not notice... We only saw that Jews were taken [somewhere]. They did not oppress us, local residents, but I saw later that there was a four-story house in front of ours where many Jews lived. I saw how a car drove up to that house. The car... we called it a gas van, without any windows. It was a tall silver car. Jews were told that they would be taken somewhere so that Russians did not oppress them and did nothing bad. I saw how a girl from our school -- the girl lived with her parents in that house -- she was also pushed into that car. I saw people coming with suitcases and all of them were pushed into the same car. But my eyes were on that girl, I felt so sorry for her. In general [we] felt that that was the end for them. But Jews themselves also had a hope that they would be taken somewhere and never bothered again. But still there was a fear and a presentiment that was the end. I saw that the car was packed with Jews, closed, and driven away. Later I heard that gases were exhausted into those cars, into the section where the people were. And by the time Jews were taken to a certain place, they were supposed to be dead. There they were thrown out of the car, their suitcases were taken by the drivers. They were corpses already.

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05:59 Interviewer: Where was the place where they were taken?

06:02 Interviewee: That I do not know. I know that should have been, probably, a long distance so that people suffocated and died. Maybe there were few alive among them, but they all were buried in a hole or somewhere. I know that because I had acquaintances who were in jail under the political article and there was an old Jewish woman who was shot together with Jews but survived and managed to get out while surrounded by corpses. She managed to escape but then was put in a Soviet jail.

06:51 Interviewer: Let's get back to the car. When you saw it – was it driving up or it stayed there already?

06:59 Interviewee: It already stayed near the house. People were coming out of it, they were rushed to hurry up. And there were stairs that could have been put up. [At that moment] they were put down and people were coming up into the car. Then the stairs were put up, closed and driven away. That was what I saw.

07:21 Interviewer: When you saw that car, was the door opened already?

07:27 Interviewee: yes, it was opened.

07:29 Interviewer: And the stair were put down?

07:30 Interviewee: yes.

07:31 Interviewer: Did you see how they were put down?

07:33 Interviewee: no, they were put down already.

07:38 Interviewer: And people, were they already coming inside the car or they were just urged to come?

07:43 Interviewee: There were Germans, even women in a German military uniform, who driven them out of the house - 'chop-chop' – so that they would get inside the car faster. So there was a woman who stayed near that car and also rushed them so that they hurried up.

08:05 Interviewer: The woman who stayed next to the car, who was she?

08:10 Interviewee: She was German.

08:12 Interviewer: How do you know that?

08:14 Interviewee: Well she was in a German military uniform.

08:16 Interviewer: Was she the only one who was taking people into the car or there was someone else?

08:21 Interviewee: She was the one who ousted [Jews] from the house and there was another one who took them into the car.

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08:26 Interviewer: Was anyone sitting inside the car on the driver's place?

08:34 Interviewee: nobody was there. Only those Jews and the driver --

08:37 Interviewer: -- No, I mean the driver, was he there?

08:40 Interviewee: In the car in general?

08:42 Interviewer: In the car.

08:43 Interviewee: Well in that section where a driver should sit -- he was.

08:48 Interviewer: Tell me, please, how do you know that those people, who were taken to the car, were Jews?

08:56 Interviewee: Practically I do not know -- [were they] Jews or not, there was no a nationality like that. But those who were taken into the car -- because I know that Jews were taken away, nobody else. One was not allowed to come close to them. Only Jews were taken away. Those who lived in ghettos, they were also expelled from the houses so that they would go away [into the car].

09:25 Interviewer: The house that was in front of you from where the people were driven out -- was it big or small?

09:32 Interviewee: It was a four-story house.

09:35 Interviewer: How many people were taken to that car?

09:39 Interviewee: I do not know for sure, but I know that the car was full. But how many -- I do not know.

09:46 Interviewer: But were there many--

09:47 Interviewee: I know that many Jews lived in that house.

09:50 Interviewer: Were there five people? Ten? Or more?

09:55 Interviewee: More. Entire families. Few families.

10:02 Interviewer: When everyone was put into that car, you said there were two German women in military uniform.

10:10 Interviewee: yes.

10:10 Interviewer: One was at the entrance...

10:11 Interviewee: yes.

10:12 Interviewer: -- and the other one stayed near the car.

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10:15 Interviewee: yes.

10:16 Interviewer: And who closed that door?

10:18 Interviewee: The one who stayed next to the car. [She] hermetically put up the stairs and the car left.

10:29 Interviewer: She closed the door, put up the stairs –

10:33 Interviewee: -- yes

10:34 Interviewer: -- and did she make any other moves?

10:38 Interviewee: Nothing else. She sat in a car and left. I did not see anything else.

10:42 Interviewer: And the one who stayed near --?

10:44 Interviewee: -- she also left with them.

10:46 Interviewer: Also left with them...

10:48 Interviewee: yes.

10:49 Interviewer: Tell me, please, were there any windows inside the car?

10:52 Interviewee: No, there were none. There was only one door in the back but no windows.

10:59 Interviewer: What was the color of the car?

11:01 Interviewee: Silver.

11:04 Interviewer: Tell me, please what the approximate size of the car was?

11:11 Interviewee: How can I say... I know it is like those cars which transport food. Such enclosed cars with only doors at the back. It was this kind of car. Maybe it was bigger than the cars of such type, wider and longer. But how long it could be... I have no idea.

11:37 Interviewer: In general, how many times did you see such kind of cars in Rostov-on-Don?

11:42 Interviewee: That was the only time I saw it because Germans were [here] for a little while, only for a week. The car left and that was it. And then, I told you, after they retreated, the sister of my father came and told us that near the house where she lived 150 civilians were killed. There were not so many Jews but Russians. Some partisan killed one officer and because of him 150 people were shot. It was an autumn already, probably it was a November because there was a little snow. I remember how my mother and I went to watch it – we saw a lot of killed people covered with snow. That's what I saw and then --

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12:51 Interviewer: How were they killed?

12:54 Interviewee: They were killed this way. They were supposed to retreat. They were retreating at night. It was not allowed to go outside in the evening, everybody had to stay at home. But when they saw that their officer was killed, they had to shoot 150 people. And where can you find them if there was no one [outside]? They set on fire a big house – four- or five-story house. I think a four-story. And people started jumping out of the house to escape the fire. At that time they [Germans] were catching people and shooting them on the square across the road...

13:44 Interviewer: Did you see the fire itself?

13:47 Interviewee: Well I did not see the fire at all, only heard about it and saw that people were beaten up.

13:52 Interviewer: But the house, was it burned?

13:54 Interviewee: No, the house... Maybe it stood behind the... There was an elite one. The skeleton of that house or... probably not.

14:05 Interviewer: How do you know that it was a punishment for the killed officer?

14:09 Interviewee: Afterwards people were saying that 150 people were supposed to be shot. The officer was killed and, therefore, they carried out their promise. And after that the Russians returned and Germans retreated. Russians returned in 1941 and there were no Germans until 1942. In 1942 Rostov was seized after heavy bombardment. I survived that bombardment and they came probably in June or in summer. And in September they captured us all, together with the youth. It was posted everywhere that [everyone] necessarily should have come to register. This way they gathered us and took out. This is everything I saw.

15:17 Interviewer: You said that you saw how a Jew was taken somewhere. When and how did it happen?

15:24 Interviewee: I remember that time quite well. It either happened when they came the first time or probably during the second time. Because the first time they came was in autumn, and the second time – it was in summer. During the summertime our yard was opened and we had a stove to cook outside when it was hot to cook inside the house. So I stayed next to my mother when she was cooking something and I saw how a Jew was led somewhere – very intelligent, old; his head was down and he held some small package in his hands. On both sides from him walked Germans with guns. Mother looked at them and said, 'Poor man. He is going to be killed, probably. Is he guilty for anything? What did he do wrong? Let's at least pray for him'. This is what I remember.

16:30 Interviewer: How did you know that he was Jewish?

16:35 Interviewee: Well, how did I know... I knew that Germans were capturing Jews, nobody else. I assumed.

16:46 Interviewer: As I understood there were two occupations. One in the fall --

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16:53 Interviewee: -- yes.

16:54 Interviewer: And the other one was in the summer a year after.

16:57 Interviewee: yes, yes.

16:59 Interviewer: And the occasion with that car you called the gas van, was it during the first occupation or the second?

17:05 Interviewee: During the first occupation... Although maybe during the second, who knows. But I think... maybe during the second because people выходили раздетые, it was in the summer. It was the second occupation. I remember that girl, she was in a dress. Very beautiful girl and dressed very well. Very intelligent girl. She was with parents but I paid attention to her and not her parents. I was looking at her all the time and thinking 'How is it possible that she will be killed — she is so young, so beautiful'. I thought maybe they would have mercy on her.

17:52 Interviewer: When you stood and watched what was happening and the car, those people – did you know what kind of car was that? You personally?

18:03 Interviewee: We knew. We did not know for sure but we assumed that if the car was without windows, without anything; if they were packed inside and the door was hermetically sealed. And then we heard that they exposed gas inside the car not into the air. And we also heard that people died because of that. But how people knew about it - probably they assumed as well.

18:38 Interviewer: How far did you stay from that car?

18:41 Interviewee: How far? Well, maybe how to that house. It was on one side of the street, and that house was across the road.

18:57 Interviewer: Was it 100 meters? 200?

19:00 Interviewee: Well I do not know how many meters it could be from one house to another.

19:07 Interviewer: Well it is quite far from here... But you stayed the way you could see the face of that girl?

19:14 Interviewee: No, I could not see the face of the girl. I knew her because we studied in the same school. I saw her quite often.

19:21 Interviewer: What was her name, do you remember?

19:23 Interviewee: No. I was not acquainted with her. There was another girl, Jewish family lived there. Not in that house but nearby. Lena Greenberg lived there, my friend. I know this because we studied in the same class. But I did not know what happened to her, I did not see her.

19:51 Interviewer: Tell me, please, was Lena Greenberg put in that car as well?

19:54 Interviewee: No, as I said I did not see where she was. I met her only after the war.

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20:02 Interviewer: Tell me, please, try to remember whether the case with the car happened during the first occupation in autumn or in summer?

20:13 Interviewee: Probably during the second occupation. The second. Because it happened in the summer. I now try to remember the way they were dressed. It was snowing during the first occupation, but it was the second occupation because they were in summer cloths.

20:27 Interviewer: Tell me, please... did you have a chance to see any special German orders or instructions regarding Jews?

20:43 Interviewee: well only that they were invited to the

20:47 Interviewer: What kind of invitation was that? Was it printed?

20:50 Interviewee: It was printed on small pieces of paper and stuck on houses. And there were people who worked with those Germans. They were either Russians or locals who reported on where the Jews were. People like that, unfortunately, existed.

21:18 Interviewer: Was there an order requiring Jews to wear any differential signs?

21:26 Interviewee: Yes. They were ordered to wear yellow bands with black star on it. The Star of David.

21:39 Interviewer: And they wore them?

21:41 Interviewee: They did.

21:43 Interviewer: Did you see how Jews were resettling to ghettos?

21:47 Interviewee: No, I did not. I only knew that they had to resettle. I saw how that Jew was taken [somewhere] – probably he did not go to ghetto and at that moment he was being taken there. As I said, there were Judas who reported in which houses Jews lived.

22:09 Interviewer: How do you know that there were such Judas?

22:14 Interviewee: How do I know? I know. Is there a place without them?

22:20 Interviewer: Well were people talking or rumors were going around?

22:22 Interviewee: Yes, people used to say that there were those who reported [on Jews]. There were Jews... well Lena Greenberg – she did not look like a Jew at all, her mother as well. But they were afraid to stay because they knew that their neighbors could report on them. Therefore they were evacuated. They – Lena, her mother, and little sister got to some kolkhoz (communal farm) and could not move further because Germans ran for them. But at that time they were already dressed as shepherds and looked after livestock in the kolkhoz.

23:17 Interviewer: I am sorry, but did Germans recognize that she was a Jew?

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22 Interviewee: No, they did not recognize her.

25 Interviewer: Tell me, please, those Jews who were taken to that big truck – did they have yellow arm bands?

32 Interviewee: No, I did not see. Whether they had them or not – I do not know, I did not see. Maybe they had, but I do not remember that.

23:43 Interviewer: When that truck moved off — did it move slowly or maybe stopped somewhere after that?

23:49 Interviewee: No, it left fast. Doors were closed and it drove away fast. I do not know if there were people inside before or not or there were only those whom they took from that house – I do not know that, I cannot say.

24:03 Interviewer: How old, approximately, was that girl you saw?

24:07 Interviewee: the one who was taken to the car? Well she was maybe 15-14. We were 16 already because it happened a year after in summer.

24:23 Interviewer: Now we will take a break... I wanted to clarify one more time or ask whether you knew what was the nationality of the girl who studied with you in school. The girl who was taken to the car. What was her nationality?

24:46 Interviewee: Well you see, I know that she was a Jew and that she was captured when Jews were taken away. Not captured but pushed inside. It means she was a Jew. But I was not acquainted with her personally.

25:02 Interviewer: But when you studied at school – did you know that she was a Jew?

25:07 Interviewee: We knew. In school we knew which girls were Jews. I had a friend Greespun, and Greenberg. I was friends with Jews.

25:19 Interviewer: Tell me, please, did you see any cases of crime against civilian population during the first and the second occupation you observed? Was anyone hang or shot?

25:38 Interviewee: No, only what I told you. I saw in a movie how a train was bringing [people] to Auschwitz. I was shocked – a train brings Jews to Auschwitz and the door to crematorium opens and people are pushed there to crematorium. The people were alive!

26:11 Interviewer: Did you see that in Auschwitz?

26:12 Interviewee: I saw that in a movie.

26:13 Interviewer: Ah in a movie.

26:14 Interviewee: in a movie, terrible thing.

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26:18 Interviewer: I understand. Well, you are lucky you did not see that in your life.

26:22 Interviewee: In life – no. When I was in Germany, when the war was close to an end, the SS were walking around just like that, not in the army. Our chief was a good person, he warned us not to go outside because they were shooting all foreigners. Whoever they met on streets — they shot.

26:52 Interviewer: Who was it?

26:54 Interviewee: the SS.

26:56 Interviewer: Was it at the end of the war?

26:58 Interviewee: yes, it was close to the end of the war. I remember it was Easter and I was in church. Our chief came and told everyone to stay inside because the SS were shooting in the forest. They shot whoever they met

27:12 Interviewer: Did you see anyone who was shot by those SS?

27:18 Interviewee: no, I did not. We were only warned by our chief. When he found out I was not at home, he came few times. Our chief was a very good person.

27:30 Interviewer: Thank you very much...

27:42 Interviewee: ...poor nation.