

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

**Name of interviewee:** Fuhrman, Chaya

**Date of interview:** 10/6/1999

**Summary:** Chaya Fuhrman (nee Averbuch) was born March 19, 1920 in Kishinev, Moldova. This area changed hands several times while she was there. It was part of Russia until 1918, when it became part of Romania. In 1940, Kishinev became part of the Soviet Union. In Kishinev, where she grew up, anti-Semitic attitudes existed, but she includes no examples.

Her father and mother were both actors involved in Yiddish Theater, so they were not around very much. She lived with her grandparents until she began touring with her parents at a relatively young age. Acting would remain a large part of her life except for the time following June 22, 1941. War broke out and she ran to the Russian section in Tiraspol. There she hid in the basement of a theater with her entire family.

They were later forced out and took a train until it reached Quibishem.. All of the refugees were told to get out and get the grain. They were then taken to cooperative farms. They stayed in huts on the dirt floor from the end of June until October when she got on another train with her mother and father to work at another cooperative farm in Uzbekistan. While here, they did not get nearly enough food to eat, and her father went crazy and began to eat the grass. He got dysentery and was taken to a courtyard and shot. The people murdered were then covered in lime, so as not to spread disease.

There was a lot of anti-Semitism and they blamed the deaths of the Uzbeks on the Jews because the Jews were not allowed to fight. They were forced to farm everyday and if you didn't show up for some reason you were considered a deserter and shipped off to Siberia.

The workers were given daily rations, which primarily consisted of watery soup. She would sleep on blankets donated by the Uzbeks and lice always covered her body. She became sick with malaria and would have outbreaks in the middle of work. She lay on the ground and returned to the job. She couldn't just take the day off or she would be shipped to Siberia. She did not see soap for three years until one day in 1943 they rationed each person a bar of soap.

At some point she heard that the boss of the cooperative was taking the rice he was supposed to ration and used it to throw parties. She took this information and went to the party headquarters in town and the head of the farm was arrested.

After this she moved from the farm and took a job as a seamstress in town and was able to get the same job for her mother. The conditions here were better.

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She claims it was her sense of humor that brought her through this experience. Everyone working in the factory were Jewish except for the foreman, and they were all treated pretty well.

She met her husband here, and they were married at the end of '43. She wanted to take his last name, which was Polish so she could leave Russia after the war. At the beginning of '45 the war was finished and she was still working in the clothing factory. They were no longer everyone's enemy, but were still not liked. The Greek Orthodox Church blamed the Jews for communism. The Jews who were members of the "intelligencia" were sent to Siberia to be killed. At the end of '45 she left with her husband and mother for Poland. They took a two-month train trip and if you got off the train you were shot.

In '47 she got pregnant and they decided it was time to leave Poland so they made the journey through Czechoslovakia to Austria. They made it across the boarder and were taken to live in barracks in Linnets. The baby was born here, a baby girl (she was born with a hole in her heart, luckily she survives today). From here they were taken to Genoa and boarded a boat bound for Israel.