

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Fainghersh, Raisa

Date of interview: 2/26/1992

Summary: Raisa Fainghersh was born in 1915 in Bershad, Ukraine. During her childhood Raisa attended a Jewish school where she learned to read and write Yiddish. Her mother and father attended a synagogue and celebrated the Jewish religious holidays. Raisa remembers some incidents of anti-Semitism before the Holocaust. When Raisa was about four years old their town avoided a massive pogrom. At that time, all of the Jews were gathered in the town's synagogue. There were rumors of an upcoming massacre until one of the men in town stood up for the Jewish population. In the years leading up to the war Raisa married Yasha Finaref. Soon their daughter, Lida, was born.

At the start of the war Raisa's husband was called into the army. Her husband later died in battle. Raisa stayed behind in Bershad with her 2.5 year old daughter and her elderly mother. She remembers the Nazis entering her hometown. The violence began with the Nazis trying to rape a woman in town. The woman's mother tried to protect her daughter, the Nazis shot and killed her in response. As the Nazis entered the town Raisa tried to evacuate with her daughter and mother. Raisa packed some belongings and loaded them onto their only horse. Raisa led the horse while her mother walked behind them with Lida in her arms. As they were walking they saw the Nazi officers ahead. Raisa grabbed her daughter and hid with her in the grass of the field. However, Raisa soon realized that the grass around her was burning. She decided it was better to come out into the open. At that point the Nazis had already surrounded the area, therefore, the only thing left for her to do was to return home. Her attempt at evacuation had failed.

Upon her return home the Nazis issued an order that established a Ghetto in Bershad, forbade the Jewish people from leaving the Ghetto, and forced the Jewish population to wear a yellow star. Furthermore, Jews were not allowed to own money. Raisa's house was in the territory of the Ghetto. Raisa's family remained in the Ghetto from 1941-1945. Raisa traded the family belongings for food. She worked in order to have a chance of getting food for her family. There was an outbreak of typhus in the Ghetto. Lida became sick with typhus. On that day Raisa refused to go to work because of her daughter's illness. The Nazi officials then locked her in basement. This was during the winter and she almost died because of the cold.

During Raisa's stay in the ghetto there were members that would lend their belongings to benefit and save the Jewish community. The members wrote their names on a piece of paper in hopes that some of their goods would be returned to them after liberation. The list was hidden in a bottle that was buried under a house. Unfortunately, there was a boy in the Ghetto who worked with the Nazis. The boy noticed that there was a meeting at the house. He reported the meeting to the Nazis who surrounded the house. They first shot at the house and then

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

threw a bomb inside. The explosion resulted in bringing the hidden bottle to the surface. The Nazis discovered the list and murdered the 250 people whose names appeared on the list. Among the dead was Shrentse, a lawyer who saved many lives by negotiating with the Nazis. The massacre occurred two weeks before liberation.

Raisa survived with her daughter and her mother. After liberation she went back to work. She remarried in 1971. Raisa stressed the rise of anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic gangs in the early 1990's. She explains how the rising anti-Semitism shaped her decision to immigrate to the United States on August 25, 1991.