

RG-50.477.0998

Summary

Ruzhena Chekhanovska was born in 1925 in Łódź, Poland. She had three much older sisters; Hanna, Regina, and Edith. Her father was a shoe maker. They had a hard life, had little money.

When the Germans came to Poland the family lived in Konstantinov, the region of city Łódź. The family was placed in the ghetto. She remembered that in the ghetto they stayed in the house, were very afraid to go to the street. Jews were killed every day without any reason, parents were separated from children. It was all very confusing for a small girl. She was a very happy playful child. Her world turned upside down.

When the Germans and the policemen came to their house to order them to go to the central plaza, they shot her grandmother, who was paralyzed in front of the family.

Jews were ordered to leave their homes and go to the center of the ghetto. They were allowed to take a few items; the people were convoyed outside of the ghetto. There were children, older people who were allowed to sit on the wagons. She remembered the German soldiers and barking dogs. She felt that it was the end of the world. They walked through the night. She remembered that two wagons collapsed, and people started yelling: "run, run". She remembered that her sister Regina, pulled her by the arm and they started running. They were separated from the rest of the family. She remembered gun shots, blood, dogs pulling people apart. In a complete chaos they walked without any direction. People didn't want to stay in big groups. People were hiding from each other. Local bandits were killing and robbing running people. Ruzhena remembered that it was getting cold and she almost died.

When they reached the boarder, Polish solders started shooting into the crowd of refugees and they continued walking towards another border, where they saw the German soldiers. They were hiding from those solders and eventually they reached a boarder with Russia. The older people thought that they would be saved, but the Central Government didn't allow the refugees inside the country at that time. Meanwhile more hungry, sick refugees were coming to the boarder and they finally opened the border.

Ruzhena with her older sister and her husband arrived in the city Bialystok. All refugees were gathered in a very big place, they were registered; it took several days. After registration people were put into the cattle wagons; some were sent to Siberia, some to Ural. Ruzhena and her sister were sent to Siberia, Krasnoyarskiy region. They were sent to the Paper factory - Bumstroy, near a coal mine. It took them several months to get to Siberia. It was very very cold.

When they arrived, they saw mountains of snow and the barracks. In tiny rooms people used ovens to heat the rooms. They received bread cards.

They lived there for one year. During that year they were checked out to exclude spies. Her sister and husband worked. Ruzhena was learning Russian. Regina wanted to go back to Minsk,

despite absence of any information. It was April-May of 1941. Regina and her husband receive Soviet passports. They were permitted to go to Minsk. When they arrived, they found a room in Calvaria, near Minsk. Regina and her husband tried to find their family and find jobs in Minsk. They moved to Minsk in June of 1941.

Ruzhena stayed at home because she had stomach ulcer; she was very weak. Her sister with her husband went to work every day.

One day they found their mother and two middle sisters. The older sister with her husband and the father were lost, probably they died.

When the war was announced her family wanted to run away. The Jewish people around them didn't believe that Minsk will be occupied and many families decided to stay. Ruzhena and family were placed in the Minsk ghetto. The address was Butonov street 39. Ruzhena remembered that they wore the number of the house on their clothes.

Ruzhena remembered that her sister gave birth to a girl, Lenochka who soon died while she was watching her, while adults went to work. Regina and her husband secretly buried the baby in the old Jewish cemetery inside the ghetto.

In the ghetto Jewish people were always hungry, dirty, sick. They lived 20 people in one room. She remembered that everybody made so called "malina"- secret escape passes. They had pogroms all the time. They selected people for exhausting labor. People who were selected for work outside the ghetto tried to exchange things for food and establish connections with the outside world.

There were many underground groups of resistance in Minsk ghetto. They had connections with partisans. Many people tried to escape, but it was very difficult, people were afraid of each other. Ruzhena lived in the ghetto from 1941 till 1943. On March 2nd, 1942 her sisters and her mother went to work to clean the railroad. When they returned to the ghetto the situation was different, they saw many gestapo men, many dogs. The people were divided into two groups, children separated from parents, wives from husbands. One group was murdered; sent to the gas chambers, shot and thrown into the huge pit on Yubileynaya street, or shot inside the ghetto. Everybody was ordered to take clothes off; many people were thrown wounded. Ruzhena's family was killed during that pogrom.

Ruzhena, being a young girl worked in the building was at home, occupied by the German soldiers who were moving back to Germany from the front. The workers were let by the side path, they didn't have to go to the main plaza and they were not killed.

Ruzhena was all alone, she lived in the house with Misha Zilberglaid, his wife Esfir Chertova and (they live in Chicago now) his father, Zyama.

Misha's father, grandfather Zyama, tried to help Ruzhena. Misha found a connection with partisans and was planning the escape. He wanted to take his father with him, but his father

said, that he is old and that he wanted to stay with his people, he asked Misha to take Ruzhena. It was very dangerous to leave the ghetto. The partisans found two Jewish people, Mayor and his son Elli, who worked for the Germans. Ruzhena remembered that people tried to save their lives at any cost, the Germans were promising them everything, they manipulated people into becoming their "spies". The partisans tricked these two men into leaving the ghetto. When Misha and his wife were ready to leave grandfather Zyama almost pushed Ruzhena out of the house, he saved her life. Ruzhena remembered that she followed Misha and the group that was going to partisans.

Under the fire they escaped and reached the place called Skirmontovo, controlled by partisan squads. Partisans accused those two men Mayor and his son of working for Germans and helping them to murder many Jewish people; they were shot in front of everybody.

In Skirmontovo the group that escaped the ghetto was divided between the partisan squads. Ruzhena ended up in Sholem Zorin's squad that gathered about 600 Jews saved from Minsk ghetto. This squad was later numbered 106 squad. The Jewish squad had some active members that had assignments to bomb stations, stop German cars.

Ruzhena was in charge of a "watch point". The squad had very little food, the girls and women were doing everything: washing clothes for men, trying to grow some vegetables on the deserted fields, cooking. They shared food with other squads.

Sholem Zorin, survived and later immigrated to Israel.

The video was interrupted and stopped.