

Galina Vladimirovna Ryabtseva, Interviewed March 29, 2014
Summary by Joseph Bradley, March 30, 2020

Galina Vladimirovna Ryabtseva was born in February 1927 in Smolensk, Russia. When the war started, she and her family fled the bombing in Smolensk. When the Germans occupied Smolensk and the entire region around it, Galina and her family returned to Smolensk, where they lived in partly burned out barracks; at some point [not specified] they also lived in a dugout. They didn't have passports, they had German ID cards.

Galina reported that she had a very good Jewish friend Roza Samoilovna Rosova, born in 1925. A good part of the interview concerns Galina's childhood friend Roza. Galina and Roza lived together during the occupation of Smolensk. They were best of friends before the war, they went to school together.

When Germans ordered all Jewish men to come for registration to the commandant house, only Roza's father went and he was placed into the Jewish ghetto called Sadki near Smolensk. Roza and her Ukrainian Jewish mother shared a room in the barracks with Galina's family. Since many documents were destroyed in the bombing, there was nothing to prove that Roza and her mother were Jews. The neighbors did not know they were Jews, even though Roza's father came to visit. Galina remembered that she and Roza went several times to visit the ghetto. Galina also remembered that Roza's father came to their place several times to get some food.

Jews were forced to wear a yellow star and live in a ghetto in the northeast part of the city, an area called Sadki. They lived in overcrowded old wooden houses. The ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire, and Germans guarded the gate. On 15 July 1942 the ghetto was liquidated and the Jews were taken to a killing field called Viazovenki [Vyazoven'ka, Вязовенька], on the outskirts of Smolensk, and shot. A memorial stands there today. [Viazovenki was also the site of a POW camp.] A Jewish boy told Galina how people were also killed in gas vans, called dushegubki.

Roza and her mother were inseparable from Galina. They survived the war. After the liberation Roza worked in the military department, Galina worked for the telephone company in different capacities.