

HÖLLINGEROVÁ, Ružena
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Abstract

Ružena Hollingerová was born on February 24, 1924 in Volary, Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic). Her family and other Czech families helped Jewish women who were brought there and held captive or hidden. Her family hid two Jewish girls, who were considered sisters, during World War.

Before the war, most of Volary's citizens were German, and some were Czech. No Jews lived there. But during the war, about 20 emaciated Jewish women were brought to Volary and guarded by two Germans, who kicked and beat them.

The city's residents were "shocked" by the women's appearance. They were only skin and bone, had no hair, and wore gray clothes with the Jewish star. One escaped to seek food and water. A woman named Paule gave her some bread, and the captive later brought fellow captives to her. Paule and some other Czech women cleaned the Jewish women, burned all their clothes, gave them food and new clothes.

Ružena's neighbor, Anna Pek, hid two Jewish women, a German and a Czech girl, in an attic room. Ružena brought them milk and bread, although she was afraid she would be found out. Many of Ružena's relatives also helped the women.

Most were held in a shed and slept on the ground. People brought food for them, but the guards wouldn't let them eat it. When the Americans arrived, the German guards tried to hide the women, and marched them into a meadow. When one couldn't walk any farther, a guard shot her.

Everything got better after the Americans came. At one point, the Americans placed 14 Jewish corpses next to the cemetery, and forced all residents to view them to witness what the Germans had done. Ružena says all their bodies were twisted, so she realized that they could not have died from natural causes.

One of the Jews, Mrs. Dengler from Poland, remained in Volary after she got better.

It is awful that people did such things to other people, Ružena says.

Oral history interview with Ružena Höllingerová

1-10 min.

Ružena Hollingerová was born on February 24, 1924 in Volary, Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic). She attended school for eight years. Her mother worked for farmers as a helper and cleaned tracks. She also washed clothes and cleaned offices and waiting rooms. Her father was a wood turner (creating shaped objects on a lathe). A brother had died. The Hollingerová family hid two girls, who were like sisters.

Most Volary residents were German and some were Czech. Before the war, Volary had no Jewish residents. Everyone got along well; there were no negative relationships. Most Czechs were farmers or worked on tracks. Ružena and her family lived in a German community.

Life in Volary changed after occupation. Many men died in the war. Some families lost the father and sons. Her mother's cousin died at age 20 in a submarine during the war.

Before the war, there had been political speeches, usually on May 1. But when war came, the speeches stopped.

10-20 min.

At the end of the war, something tragic happened in Volary. Typhus had spread all over town, and killed the old and the young, including babies. Ružena's four-month-old baby died of typhus.

Everything got better when the Americans came. When they saw a dead girl, they even took off their helmets and paid their respects. The girls who didn't survive the concentration camp were buried at the cemetery (note from cataloger: it's possible that she's talking about the concentration inmates who were sent on a death march to Volary), but only family could go there. Before the Americans came to Volary, the city had many Hungarians and Germans. The Germans ran away after the war ended. The Hungarians ran from the Russians and wanted to get to the Americans. Once, when Hungarians got to the American troops, the Americans handed them back to the Germans.

When the Jewish girls came to Volary, everybody was shocked. Everybody watched, to find out what was happening. The girls were very thin, just bones covered in skin. One of them, Mrs. Dengler from Poland, stayed in Volary after she got better.

The first time Ružena saw the girls she was in town. There were about 20 girls and were watched by two guards. Ružena's grandparents saw the group leaving through the meadow. The Germans wanted to hide the girls so the Americans would not see what was going on. When a girl could not walk anymore, a guard shot her.

20-30 min.

The guards were acting horribly toward the Jewish girls, kicking them and beating them. The guards took them out of the city so no one would see them. Ružena says she knows that after the Americans freed the Jewish girls, the former captives ran off, and the Americans killed the two guards. Some of the Jewish girls had escaped earlier from the guards. One who got away ran to a mill and begged for food and water. A woman gave her some bread, so the Jewish girl brought the other girls to the mill. The woman was risking her life, but still wanted to help. She, with some other Czechs, burned all the girls' clothes, cleaned them, gave them food and new clothes to wear. The woman's name was Paule.

Some of the girls hid with families. Her neighbor, Anna Pek, hid two girls. Once, they asked whether any German soldiers were still there. When they learned that no Germans remained, the girls asked Ružena whether she knew who they were. She nodded yes after seeing their gray scarves and clothes. Anna had two sons in the war, and only one returned.

One of the girls was German and the other girl was Czech. Ružena brought them food, but was very afraid that someone would tell on her and she would get in trouble. Anna made a room for them in the attic, where they could not be seen. No one knew about it, Ružena says. Many of Ružena's relatives helped the Jewish girls.

30-40 min

Before the Americans came, the other Jewish girls were living in a shed, and slept on the ground. People brought them food, but the guards wouldn't let the girls eat it. After the Americans came, the girls moved to a school, where German girls took care of them. One of Ružena's friends took care of them there. A Jewish girl once died in front of her. It is awful that people did such things to other people.

Ružena brought milk and bread to the girls, who were very hungry. She heard that they even ate grass to ease their hunger. They looked awful, wore gray clothes and the Jewish star. They had no hair.

Ružena saw some dead bodies in Volary. Fourteen of them were placed next to the cemetery. All of their bodies were twisted, so she realized that they could not have died from natural causes. The Americans forced everyone in the city to go look at the corpses, to witness what the Germans have done.

After the funeral, she saw a girl sitting on top of a coffin. The girl said her sister was in the coffin. The American pastor was very angry.

Ružena also recalled walking with her grandmother and looking inside the house of a German veterinarian. The girls looked much better. They even recognized Ružena and her grandmother.

40-56 min.

When the men were sent to war, the women had to start working. Some of the men were sent to Moscow, where they were very cold. The women sent them some warmer clothes, such as jackets and scarves. But they never got the package, and most of them froze to death, Ružena says.

After the war, when the Czechs returned to Volary, they had no problems with the German residents because the Czechs knew the German residents had nothing to do with war. The Germans were not forced to leave, they were allowed to stay. Ružena bought the house she was living in because if she didn't they would have had to leave.

Once, she saw the guards taking the girls somewhere. The guards used a baton to beat the girls. When a girl didn't get up, they shot her.