

## Rita (Lifschitz) Rubinstein



### **Born December 12, 1936, in Văscăuți, Romania**

Rita Rubinstein was born Rifka Lifschitz on December 12, 1936, in Văscăuți, Romania (now Vashkivtsi, Ukraine) to Abraham and Tabel Lifschitz. Her father operated a dry goods store and small factory along with his brother-in-law. Rita was raised in a loving home, which her family shared with an aunt and uncle and their two children, as well as with her paternal grandmother, Tzirel, and her aunt's mother-in-law. The house was equipped with modern amenities such as electricity and a radio. Rita attended synagogue services every Shabbat alongside her father, who was an observant Jew.

**First Person  
Today at 1:00pm**

### **Nazi Germany Invades the Soviet Union**

In 1940, the Soviet army marched into Văscăuți and, some months later, drafted young men, including Rita's father, into its army. Rita never saw him again. On June 22, 1941, Nazi Germany and its Axis partners, including Romania, invaded the Soviet Union. In early August, Romanian soldiers entered Văscăuți and ordered all Jews to prepare to leave in the next 24 hours, allowing them to take only what they could carry. In their attic the Lifschitzes hid money and photographs. Rita's mother bundled her up in layers and her grandmother sewed money into her own undergarments for safekeeping.



### **Romanian Authorities Deport Rita's Family to Transnistria (Romanian-occupied Ukraine)**

The next day Rita and her family, including her mother's sister Bella, who had been living with them since 1940, gathered in a large building that resembled a gymnasium. From there, Romanian authorities took them to Ataki and, from there, across the Dniester River to Mogilev-Podolsky in Transnistria.

Once at Mogilev, Rita's uncle learned where Romanian authorities had sent other members of the family. He bribed Romanian soldiers with the money that Rita's grandmother had sewn into her clothing, and the soldiers in turn took the entire family on a barge to the Shargorot ghetto in Transnistria.

There, a village family took them into their home, which had clay walls and no running water or electricity. Rita attended a small class organized by a local teacher where she learned some Hebrew, but the winters were bitterly cold and she was always hungry. Her

family remained there for three years, enduring harsh conditions and witnessing the death of their beloved grandmother.

In early 1944, Soviet troops liberated Shargorot, and the Lifschitzes began their journey back to Văscăuți. They were aided by two Soviet soldiers who hid them on a military train and then found a place for them to live, around the corner from their own house.

### **After the War**

From 1945 to 1946, Rita attended a Ukrainian school in Văscăuți and was indoctrinated with Communist teachings. During this time, she found out that her father had been killed fighting in the Soviet army. Her mother, Tabel, learned from former neighbors in Mille, who had moved to Văscăuți during the war, that Ukrainians had murdered her parents and four siblings. The neighbors witnessed the killings.

Eager to escape Communist Romania, Rita, her mother, and her aunt obtained false papers stating that they were born in Poland. With these papers, they made the difficult trip from Romania to Feldafing, a displaced persons camp in Germany administered by the US Army with the assistance of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Rita's Aunt Bella met a man on the way to Feldafing whom she wanted to marry. Refusing to have a Jewish ceremony in the camp, they obtained a civil marriage registration. After immigrating to the United States in 1947, they held a religious ceremony in Brooklyn.

Meanwhile Rita had contracted tuberculosis in the camp and was sent for nine months to a sanitarium, where her only consolation was her correspondence with her mother, who had stayed at Feldafing. Rita returned to the camp after she recovered and studied a range of subjects, from history and geography to math and Hebrew. Her mother married Leo Neufeld and, in 1949, under Bella's sponsorship, Rita, her mother, and her stepfather immigrated to the United States.

Rita earned a degree in education from Brooklyn College and became an elementary school teacher. In 1959 she married Nathan Rubinstein and moved to Maryland the next year. Together they have three daughters and eight grandchildren. After their youngest daughter was born, Rita began teaching at a Yiddish Hebrew school, where she later became principal. Today she volunteers at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

*Hear the words of Holocaust survivors in the First Person podcast series:  
<http://www.ushmm.org/learnfromsurvivors>*