

August 16 , 1999

Dear Family,

This is an interview given by our cousin Rachel Levin at the Yad Vashem Museum, Jerusalem , Israel on January 22 , 1992 , in Hebrew . I had it translated into English by Ms. Yael Greenberg , a member of my synagogue. Also, while reading a book , "From a Ruined Garden " . I recognized the town, Wlodzimierzec where Joseph Boorky's family lived, his brother Motl and Mendel his son, I think that Burak was a cousin.

Bob / Coery

Interview with Rachel Levin  
Interviewer: Aviva Kelerman  
Date: 1-22-92

A. My name is Rachel Levin. My maiden name was Burko. I was born in a town called Wladimierz, in Poland. In Polish it was called Wlodzimierzec. It was not far from a city called Sarny.

Q. Did many Jews live in your town?

A. I think there were more than 1,000 Jews. Perhaps 1,500.

Q. How many residents were there?

A. There were many Ukrainians. They lived on the outskirts of the town, and the Jews were in the center.

Q. Was it a Jewish town?

A. No. The Jews lived in the center, and around them were the Ukrainians and some Poles. Most of the residents were Ukrainians. I was born in 1929. My father sold fabrics.

Q. Did he travel a lot?

A. Yes. He used to travel to Warsaw, to Lodz, to buy merchandise.

Q. Were the fabrics sewn in your own home?

A. The fabrics were not sewn. We had a large store. We were well off, as they say. I had a good childhood. I went to a Polish school, and in the afternoon I learned Hebrew. In our town children studied Hebrew. My mother tongue was Yiddish. At home we spoke Yiddish. All the Jewish residents of our town spoke Yiddish.

Q. There was no Jewish school?

A. No, I went to a Polish school. Whoever wanted to learn Hebrew had to take private lessons in the afternoon.

Q. Of what origin were most of the kids at school?

A. It was mixed: Ukrainians, Jews, and some Poles.

Q. What was the language used at the school?

A. Polish, of course.

Q. And what language was spoken in the street? What did the children speak?

A. Among themselves the Jews spoke only Yiddish.

Q. And what did you speak with the other children?

A. We had no contact with other children. We lived in an area that was exclusively Jewish, and we played only with Jewish children.

Q. But you must have had contact with non-Jews. For example, how many goyim were in your class?

A. Many. I can't remember, I was a little girl. But I think that half of the children were Jewish and the rest were Ukrainians and Poles.

Q. You didn't play with them or go to their homes?

A. No, there was no contact. We were separated. It was a Zionist village. There were many youth movements. I didn't belong yet, because I was a little girl. It was customary to belong to the "Shomer HaTsair", the "Halutz", "Gordonia". There were numerous Zionist youth movements.

Q. It wasn't an orthodox village?

A. Not really. There were a few Hassidic Jews.

Q. And in your home?

A. My grandparents were orthodox, but not fanatics, the way they are in Israel. They kept kosher and observed the Shabbat.

Q. Did your father wear a hat?

A. My grandfather did. My father was Masorti.

Q. Were your parents born in Poland too?

A. Yes, in the same town.

Q. Was all communal life strictly among Jews?

A. Yes.

Q. So, when you spoke Polish one could notice that you weren't Polish?

A. I repeat: I was a little girl. I completed only three grades in a Polish school. I don't remember much. What can a girl of this age remember? - When I went to school I studied Polish, but at home we didn't speak Polish. We spoke mostly Yiddish.

Q. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A. Yes. I have a brother and I had three younger sisters. I am the oldest child.

Q. Were you Zionists already then?

A. Yes, my father was a Zionist.

Q. What changes took place - what do you remember? - You were already ten years old - when the Russians came?

A. The Russians came in 1939. By the standards of our town we were considered rich. The Russians took our store. My father went to work as a clerk. I went to school. By then we had a Jewish school.

Q. Was the Jewish school established when the Russians came?

A. The Russians opened a special school for Jewish children. I continued my education in this Jewish school. They taught also Russian and Ukrainian there. I went to this school for two years.

Q. Before the Russians came, did you have a maid?

A. Yes, a Ukrainian maid.

Q. Did you speak Ukrainian with her?

A. Of course.

Q. How many rooms did you have?

A. Three rooms and a kitchen.

Q. The maid slept in the kitchen?

A. I don't remember. In those days people used to sleep on the oven, where it was warm. I can't remember whether she slept in our home or not. I think she did.

Q. Did your mother work?

A. She helped in the store. When the Russians came she didn't work.

Q. What other changes took place when the Russians came? How was the food situation?

A. Food was O.K.

Q. Did the maid remain with you?

A. No, when the Russians came we didn't have a maid.

A lot changed, of course. The situation was very different. For me personally, as a little girl, things were good when the Russians were there. I went to school and everything was fine, till the Germans came.

Q. The Germans came in 1941 -

A. I think it was in June of 1941 that they entered our village. I'll tell you something. During the interval between the Russians and the Germans there was a week of chaos, and it was then that the Ukrainians attacked us. The Ukrainians were very bad.

Q. This was before the Germans came?

A. Yes. There was no authority, nobody in charge, so they went on a pogrom. The first victim in our village was my grandfather.

Q. What happened to him?

A. They entered every house in order to take things. They broke windows. He probably resisted them, so they killed him on the spot. During the night of the pogrom they killed three Jews.

Q. They entered all the homes and stole everything?

A. We ran away from the house, of course, so they wouldn't kill us.

Q. Where did you go?

A. We went outside. In the morning we returned and saw - they took things. The Ukrainians, I mean.

Q. Where did you go that night?

A. We went to a good Pole. Some of the Ukrainians were my father's friends, and they also helped us.

Q. How many were you in the family, five?

A. Five children.

Q. And all of you ran away?

A. Yes, on that night.

Q. What else do you remember from that night?

A. That's it. We returned home.

Q. It was one night?

A. One night. The pogrom lasted one night. After a few days the Germans entered. I was twelve years old, I looked through the window, and they said to me, "Look, that's the Gestapo!" They were on motorcycles. It was the first time that I had ever seen Germans. Then they put us in a ghetto.

Q. Were there any people from your village who ran away with the Russians?

A. Yes, but not with families. Single people. Whole families didn't run away.

Q. Then the Germans came. What do you remember?  
Did you see them coming?

A. Yes. After they entered our town they established the Judenrat and created a ghetto.

Q. Immediately after they entered?

A. I can't remember. Perhaps a month later, as they did in all towns.

Q. What else do you remember from that period?

A. I didn't go to school. I stayed at home. I was frightened whenever I saw the Germans. Whenever they caught a Jew on the street they would cut off his beard and hit him.

The young men were taken to do all kinds of work.

Q. What did your father do?

A. He worked. All the men worked.

Q. What kind of work did your father do?

A. Hard labor. He worked with trees... I can't remember.

Q. How did they move you to the ghetto? Where was the ghetto?

A. We remained in our own home. It was a small town. There was a main street and on its two sides lived Jews. For example, my grandparents lived across the street from us. I wasn't allowed to cross the street. All the Jews from the neighboring towns were brought to our town. We lived together with another family. It was crowded.

Q. Were you about ten people in the house?

A. Yes. There was very little food. My father used to bring food. He worked out of town, and sometimes he would bring back with him food that he had gotten there.

Q. Did your grandparents also come to your area?

A. No, they were on the other side. I wasn't allowed to cross the road. I couldn't see them. I had to go around and around in order to get to their side of the street.

Q. Was there a fence on the street?

A. There was no fence, but whoever crossed the street was beaten up.

Q. Were there guards?

A. Yes. Most of the guards were Ukrainians. There were guards throughout the village to prevent any escapes. It was impossible to get out of there.

Q. The area included a few streets?

A. Yes, around the main street. The place was thick with Ukrainian guards.

Q. Was the main street used for transportation at all?

A. No. It was a small village. There were horses and wagons - they continued to travel in the main street - but we were not allowed there.

Q. Was your mother at home with you?

A. Yes, the whole family.

Q. Two families, yes?

A. Yes, there was another family living with us.

Q. How did you manage with so many people?

A. I can't remember, but we managed very well. Everyone was satisfied with whatever we had.

Q. Did your father have any contact with people outside the ghetto?

A. Yes. He had many friends - the Ukrainians and a Polish family who helped us.