

- Q. Russian soldiers?
- A. Soldiers, of course. They would give me food.
- Q. Were there other Jews who came back?
- A. There were about thirty Jews in our town.
- Q. Out of a population of over one thousand?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did these thirty Jews live in the same neighborhood?
- A. Yes, we lived next to each other. I had friends.
- Q. Were you concerned about your neighbors' reaction?
- A. No, not anymore.
- Q. But it wasn't pleasant -
- A. It wasn't pleasant to live in the town in which I was born, because so few people remained there.
- Q. Were people hostile towards you?
- A. Yes. They asked: "Why did you come back?" - We remained there for about a year, until my father returned and the war ended. In 1945. I believe it was in June of 1945 that we left our town.
- Q. Why did you choose Lodz?
- A. Most of the Jews were headed there.
- Q. Why did you leave your town and go to Lodz?
- A. Our goal was to go to Eretz Israel eventually.
- Q. What happened to your sister, the one who was handed over to the Ukrainians?
- A. He took her to the Gestapo. They informed on her.
- Q. The neighbors?
- A. Yes. The neighbors informed on her, and he had no choice.
- Q. What about the two girls and the other people?
- A. They were all murdered in the pits.
- Q. Then you went to Lodz. What did you do in Lodz?

A. I went to school there. Wherever we went my father would immediately search for a school for me and my brother. I went to a Jewish school. There I began to learn Hebrew. It was a high school. I studied.

Q. You said earlier that you were a good student. How could you concentrate on your studies under these circumstances?

A. I don't know. I can't understand how I was able to be an excellent student. I guess children are affected by it less than adults. I think it is easier for a child to go through something like this.

Q. When you returned to Włodzimierzec, did you hear anything about the Melavsky family?

A. No. They took all the Poles in our town and sent them back to Poland. Not one Pole remained in our town. When we arrived in Israel we searched for them through the Polish Consulate, but we couldn't find them. Only Ukrainians remained there.

Q. When did you tell your daughter about all this?

A. I talk about it all the time. On Holocaust Remembrance Day and on the Remembrance Day for our village. I tell her a lot. Actually, I like to tell her about it. My daughter is very interested in this, very interested.

Q. When you arrived in Israel, did you talk about it?

A. Yes. Earlier we were in Pelberg. After Lodz we went to Brotslav, Poland, for two months. From Brotslav we travelled to Munich.

Q. How was life in the camp in Munich?

A. I went to school there. Later, I went to high school in Munich. There I completed two more grades.

Q. Were you allowed to go out of the camp?

A. Yes, of course. We were treated well there. After all that we had been through, this was a Garden of Eden!

Q. What kind of living accommodations did you have there?

A. We lived in cottages. In the beginning, we shared a room with another family, but later on we had our own room.

Q. Where was the room?

A. It was a room in a regular house. With a lavatory.

Q. You had your own lavatory?

A. We shared it with a few other families.

Q. Were your parents able to work?

A. My mother worked. My father worked. They worked in the camp. My mother worked in a storehouse somewhere, and my father worked too. My brother and I went to school. My girlfriend and I rented a room in Munich, and we went to high school there. On weekends we used to return home.

Q. Was there a fence around the camp or was it just a group of houses built by UNRA?

A. It was a very large camp, about 10,000 people.

A huge camp.

Q. Was it a closed camp?

A. Yes. Once it had been a camp, I don't know, a work camp.

Q. How did you get food?

A. UNRA used to give us a lot of food. They would distribute it to the families.

Q. Did you cook at home?

A. There was a kitchen, and whoever wanted food would simply take it from the kitchen.

Q. Did you have beds and blankets?

A. Yes.

Q. How did you arrive in Israel? Isn't it true that people from that camp came to Israel as illegal immigrants?

A. Yes, some people left, but we couldn't, because one had to cross borders. My father was an invalid, and we just couldn't do it. We went after the establishment of

of the state of Israel, in 1948. First, we travelled to Marseilles. We stayed there for two weeks in a refugee camp. We came to Israel on a Greek boat called "Marathon". We came to Haifa.

Q. Did your father work in Israel?

A. Yes. We found an abandoned house and we renovated it. We found it in terrible shape, and we fixed it up. We added windows, a lavatory, everything. My father opened a store for construction materials. I worked as a clerk in the post-office. A year later I met my husband, in 1949. I got married in 1950. I have two children.

Q. You mentioned earlier that there were a few Ukrainians who helped you —

A. Yes.

Q. They helped you while you were still in the forest. Why were they different from the other Ukrainians? Why did they help you?

A. There were only two families who helped us. The rest of the Ukrainians were very bad.

Q. Did you stay in touch with these two families also after the war?

A. Yes. They helped us also when my father was in the army, and my brother and I came back home. They used to give us food.

Q. What made them different from the other Ukrainians?

A. I can't explain it. They were simply good people. The husband had been in America for about one year. I don't know whether that is the reason. They were good to us. The husband also came to visit us in the forest.

Q. Do you remember their names?

A. No.

Q. They were unusual people —

A. They died a long time ago. A year ago, a group of people from our town travelled to visit those pits. They came to the town and couldn't recognize it. It had developed into a big city. The Chernobyl radiation has reached this city — that's what they got as a present! The residents can't eat the local produce.

Q. How were these people received by the residents?

A. There was no contact. They came only to see the place. Most of the local people were dead, the previous generation. The children pretend that they don't know anything.

Q. Is there any memorial?

A. There is something. They brought something back with them. In Ukrainian it is written: "Russian citizens were murdered here". There is no mention of the Jews who were murdered there.

Q. You weren't Russian —

A. Something is written there — Jews too. They brought me a photo.

Q. Do you still have a mental picture of the bunker in the forest?

A. We always had hope. We never lost hope. We believed that somehow we would survive this. Melavsky brought us news from the outside world. He came and told us that Stalingrad had fallen and the Germans were starting to retreat. When we heard this our hope became even stronger. We never lost hope.

Q. The two Ukrainian families who helped you — did they belong to a different social class?

A. Yes, they were rich. The one who helped us was a rich man. A rich farmer.

Q. He was different from the others —

A. Yes. Most of the people were bad. If they caught a Jew in the forest they would take him right away to the police station and he would be executed.

Q. Did the wives of Melavsky and the Ukrainian who visited you in the forest know that you were hiding there?

A. Yes.

Q. Were the Ukrainians Catholic?

A. No, the Ukrainians are Pravoslavs, Greek Orthodox, like the Russians.

Q. Do you think these Ukrainians were different because they had had more exposure to the outside world?

A. It is possible. I think so. These Catholics, the Poles, simply wanted to help the Jews. Their priest said to them:

"If you find a Jew in the forest, take him with you, give him food, and save him!" They did what the priest told them to do. I think we were saved thanks to this priest.

Q. Did you ever meet this priest? - I guess, since he was a Pole, he wasn't there when you returned home.

A. No. All the Poles had been sent back to Poland... I have dreams in which someone is running after me, and I run, run, run, run, but I never get anywhere. It is always the Germans or the Ukrainians who are running after me. That is a recurrent dream that I have.

Q. In particular the scene in which you run away to the forest?

A. Yes. My recurrent dreams always revolve around that - I am fleeing, fleeing, fleeing. I'm always running quickly somewhere.

Q. Do you think that this has determined your attitude towards other people who are suffering?

A. What can I say? - In general, I'm sensitive to other people. It is difficult for me to see people suffering.

Q. Do you think it has affected your attitude towards the Arabs?

A. No. I don't think so... I don't know.

Q. Whenever you think about the time in the forest, what do you carry with you besides the fear?

A. The suffering, the uncleanness, the hunger, the cold. We kept saying to ourselves: "what's going to happen to us? Will we survive this or not?" I think that because I underwent this together with my parents - who gave me a sense of security - I haven't suffered emotionally as much as many other Holocaust survivors.

Q. Thank you very much.

End of the interview with Mrs. Rachel Levin.