

Transcript:

Reva Oks

A40

25m45s

Interviewer: Why don't we talk...what country did you grow up in?

Reva Oks: Well, when the war start, I'm from Poland.

Interviewer: OK. So, we're going to talk a little bit about your life in Poland, talk a little bit about what happened when the war broke out. Were you in a ghetto?

Reva Oks: No. I wasn't in ghetto. I was in Germany in the camp. I was in Russia during the war.

Interviewer: You were in Russia during the war?

Reva Oks: Yeah.

Interviewer: OK. Why don't you tell me a little bit about growing up in Poland and what that was like?

Reva Oks: Well, we got a nice life. We were three children, three daughters.

Interviewer: Were you the oldest or the youngest?

Reva Oks: No. I was in the middle and my older sister and when the war start right when Hitler come, in our town, it was very small, but like 500 people live in the town that we live the name is Goworowo [unintelligible 0:01:28.6] valley. Father made the [unintelligible 0:01:34.5]. My older sister first married. By this time, she got two children. Her husband [unintelligible 0:01:47.8]. Yet, he didn't get enough time to send papers for my sister. So she stayed [unintelligible 0:02:11.0] house because she lived in the other house. Maybe too little. Her boy was 7 years old and the girl 3 years. [Unintelligible 0:02:24.4]. Later, we got big, [unintelligible 0:02:30.7] got quiet in the town in Goworowo. So my father goes. It was Friday. He said, "I'd go and bring candles to light," candles for Shabbat in this little place [unintelligible 0:02:50.4] and my dad didn't come back. In the morning, so it was Saturday, we tried to go back in the town of Goworowo. The Germans put everybody in the shul. Much, much people screaming [unintelligible 0:03:16.2] firing and kill everybody. He's [unintelligible 0:03:25.2] German.

Interviewer: What happened to your sister and her children?

Reva Oks: Yes. She was with us.

Interviewer: She was with you and her children?

Reva Oks: Yes, yeah, yeah. The German [unintelligible 0:03:44.3], a big guy and said, "Open the door and go out everybody." And the German took us, everybody, to a big lot and put us in a line and they said, "you on this side and you on this side, you on this side and you on this side." Maybe, you heard this. [Unintelligible 0:04:12.1]. Three sisters and the little children and my parents [made us 0:04:25.6] together and led to school [unintelligible 0:04:29.2] sit down there and finally, we came in a place. We were in Yeshiva. You know what a Yeshiva? [Unintelligible 0:04:52.4] and we stayed over there. Because of the little food we got, we stayed and later we started to--

Interviewer: Let me back you up just a little bit. Where were you living when the war broke out in 1939? Where were you living?

Reva Oks: In Poland.

Interviewer: You were in Poland?

Reva Oks: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then, where did you go after the Nazis invaded Poland?

Reva Oks: The Nazis let us go. Some say you stay because we got killed [unintelligible 0:05:30.7] looking the parents. The three children [unintelligible 0:05:36.8] sisters, they're little...my sister's two children. Let us go. So, we stopped [unintelligible 0:05:46.5]. And we came in a week time.

Interviewer: So you were with your mother?

Reva Oks: Yeah and father.

Interviewer: And your father had--

Reva Oks: I and my older sister--

Interviewer: When the war broke out, was your father still living?

Reva Oks: Oh yeah, yes [unintelligible 0:06:10.3] told people. So, it was like [unintelligible 0:06:15.0]

Interviewer: When he went to go get the Shabbat candles--

Reva Oks: Yeah. They took him in the shul. They put [match 0:06:26.9]--

Interviewer: They took him in the shul to help him?

Reva Oks: Not help. To kill [unintelligible 0:06:35.0] the Nazi--

Interviewer: The Nazis took him.

Reva Oks: Yeah, the Nazis took him and wanted to make a fire, the shul... [put to 0:06:44.7] death. But later, somebody [unintelligible 0:06:49.6] the Nazis say, "Let's go." Not to make the fire in the shul and let us go. The Nazis, the Germans, took us in a big, big lot in Goworowo, still in this place, and say, "You stay in this side and you in this side. You in this side. You in this side." They looked at me [unintelligible 0:07:30.6] the parents [unintelligible 0:07:34.8] and let us go and we start to walk until we came to a big town. This was in Bialystok. Maybe you heard Bialystok. We stayed over there. Later in 1944, got quiet, stopped the war.

Interviewer: You were living in the Bialystok--

Reva Oks: Yeah, yeah. We stayed in a big Yeshiva--

Interviewer: You were living in a Yeshiva.

Reva Oks: Yeshiva, yeah.

Interviewer: And it was 1941?

Reva Oks: 1941. [Unintelligible 0:08:18.6] asked me to go back in Russia, scout for safe place [unintelligible 0:08:32.9] neighbor to do and leave Poland. So, we go in the train and [unintelligible 0:08:41.7] everybody and let us...this was [unintelligible 0:08:50.6]. This was [unintelligible 0:08:54.6] like my sister was [unintelligible 0:09:02.6] to go, walk, and then I was walking, too. My sister, the younger, was very young. So my sister stopped to talk. Oh, you never forget [unintelligible 0:09:21.1] Russia because Stalin...I just have to tell this, her husband, [unintelligible 0:09:28.6] and I like him [unintelligible 0:09:31.5]. So you never can go [unintelligible 0:09:36.8] go out and this was like [unintelligible 0:09:44.1] like I say. To us, try to go back because like that a close friend in [unintelligible 0:09:56.8] was a big town, [unintelligible 0:09:59.4]. And I got there and I said to my sister if it will be all right. They like as a friend, a boyfriend [unintelligible 0:10:14.3] over there and he's quiet. So, I said to my sister don't you come until I write you a letter. [Unintelligible 0:10:27.1] but she didn't wait for me and she came up next day, I take a look she's here with the two children. I said I don't know what we will do now. [Unintelligible 0:10:42.5] two children, [unintelligible 0:10:48.9] for Russia to stay. It's in the middle of the night. This was a Friday night, come to worship. People used to say, you come on. [Unintelligible 0:11:06.5] you got to go. Shalom, Shalom. Just me in a train like this is for horses, for cows, [unintelligible 0:11:19.7]. He's put us in this train. You see, we got very, very far in Siberia, took us...the snow in there, very bad weather. He's put us in the [unintelligible 0:11:42.1], in the...you say [unintelligible 0:11:49.3]. You don't know? You know what you [unintelligible 0:11:55.6], what you, you put in the [oven 0:11:59.8].

Interviewer: Coal? Coal?

Reva Oks: Coal.

Interviewer: Coal?

Reva Oks: Yeah. We worked over there a long time with very little food and we got cold and everything. Later they see if she got something [unintelligible 0:12:23.7] so you go to the doctor and will give you...Russia, she said [unintelligible 0:12:35.3] like [unintelligible 0:12:36.8]. So, they send us in a forest to cut the trees to

make us [unintelligible 0:12:54.7] over there was very [unintelligible 0:12:57.5] and this was very [unintelligible 0:13:03.3]. Well, later, [unintelligible 0:13:09.2] over there I guess about two years later, America stopped. Help. [Unintelligible 0:13:18.3]. So we got freed over there. So we got back, we tried to go back to the places so they sent us [unintelligible 0:13:36.1] place in the different places, [unintelligible 0:13:42.3] to sleep very, very much. Later, we finally--

Interviewer: How long were you living like that?

Reva Oks: This was I'm sure [unintelligible 0:14:05.4], about two years and we go back [unintelligible 0:14:14.2] so try to send to different places [unintelligible 0:14:18.9].

Interviewer: You're still in the Bialystok?

Reva Oks: No, not in Bialystok. Bialystok, they sent us to the train.

Interviewer: How long were you in Bialystok? Do you remember?

Reva Oks: Well, just a couple of months.

Interviewer: So you were there 1941? You stayed there a couple of months and you went to Siberia--

Reva Oks: Yeah.

Interviewer: For about two years.

Reva Oks: Yeah. And later, in America--

Interviewer: You're still with your family? Are you family still together?

Reva Oks: No. The family, [Justavos 0:14:46.0] and my sister with the two children. My family stayed still in Russia, but very...this was very close to the Germans. And later, the Germans [unintelligible 0:15:07.2] to shoot [unintelligible 0:15:13.1] brother to my parents, the youngest sister got killed. In the beginning, [unintelligible 0:15:23.2] later come out to go [to our house 0:15:27.9] because we were still in Russia and Siberia. [For us to go to our house 0:15:35.1] for the parents, you see, my youngest sister, we came over there and they saved us and got killed. So, later, like I said, we came--

Interviewer: Do you remember how old you were around this time?

Reva Oks: About 20, yes.

Interviewer: 20?

Reva Oks: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Tell me about what you remember about liberation.

Reva Oks: Well, about the liberation, you see, [unintelligible 0:16:17.7] got first of the [unintelligible 0:16:21.1] because any minute civilians got killed [unintelligible 0:16:29.0]. It's just people [unintelligible 0:16:33.7] because no food, we're starving. But...I don't know. [Unintelligible 0:16:49.6] different places...

Interviewer: What do you remember the most about liberation?

Reva Oks: I remember most, it was we didn't get [unintelligible 0:17:06.8]. This was very bad to me. [Unintelligible 0:17:14.9]...[unintelligible 0:17:24.1] much, very, very much people. Finally, we came [unintelligible 0:17:37.6]. Our rabbi [unintelligible 0:17:43.2] he saved us and [unintelligible 0:17:46.5]

Interviewer: Did you go to a DP camp?

Reva Oks: Not...that was not DP--

Interviewer: Did you ever go to one that helped you get medical care and money and placement?

Reva Oks: Well, if you got sick, you get...you can go to [unintelligible 0:18:09.6]. I need to go to the doctor very fast. No, I say I [unintelligible 0:18:25.1]--

Interviewer: Do you remember where you went after liberation?

Reva Oks: Later, like I said, America [unintelligible 0:18:43.0]. Russia...[unintelligible 0:18:50.3]. Oh my goodness, you bring [unintelligible 0:18:53.7]. Come on, you go [unintelligible 0:18:55.8].

Interviewer: So, from Siberia, you went where?

Reva Oks: They sent us back to [unintelligible 0:19:10.1]

Interviewer: They sent you back to where?

Reva Oks: They sent us to a little [unintelligible 0:19:26.8]. There was much people in the [unintelligible 0:19:37.0]. It was over there.

Interviewer: When did you come to America? Do you remember?

Reva Oks: Oh yeah. In 1949.

Interviewer: 1949. Did you come straight to Memphis?

Reva Oks: No.

Interviewer: No.

Reva Oks: We go first...We go in Germany. From Russia, we go back [unintelligible 0:20:03.1] from Russia and we came to Poland and from Poland to Germany [unintelligible 0:20:12.6]. This was [the weather 0:20:14.9] OK because the [four of us 0:20:17.2] that was going on to make it for us. About two years in Germany. And later, I have family, [unintelligible 0:20:31.6] and we got to America. Of course, we got married in Germany, got married [unintelligible 0:20:41.5]. Russia, I met my husband. He was working in a raisin factory.

Interviewer: Raisin factory?

Reva Oks: Yeah. So I met him--

Interviewer: Raisin factory?

Reva Oks: And later, really [unintelligible 0:21:02.2] because he still not [unintelligible 0:21:11.6]. I had just seen him, talked with him [unintelligible 0:21:15.1], he going [unintelligible 0:21:18.4] he got killed. Later, I came in Germany. He's from [unintelligible 0:21:29.5]. I said, that's the time my sister with the two

children [unintelligible 0:21:37.4], so I am really coming, of course, we got to be very happy. Later, I got married over there and I got my daughter over there in Germany.

Interviewer: You were born in Germany?

Female: Uh-huh.

Reva Oks: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where in Germany where you born?

Reva Oks: [Unintelligible 0:21:55.9]

Female: Yeah, a little town outside of Munich.

Interviewer: And then you came to America. Where did you come first?

Reva Oks: I came to New York, came to New York and to Memphis.

Interviewer: To Memphis? Did you grow up in Memphis?

Female: Yes.

Reva Oks: Yeah.

Interviewer: What made you pick Memphis?

Reva Oks: Well, because my cousins sent papers.

Interviewer: Because of the papers? And that's the only reason why you came here?

Reva Oks: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you like it here?

Reva Oks: Oh yes. In the beginning, they have wanted to go to New York because New York, most rich people there. But my husband [got tired of that shop 0:22:35.1]. He missed a laid-back [unintelligible 0:22:40.2].

Interviewer: Yeah.

Reva Oks: I don't know. [Unintelligible 0:22:48.0]

Female: You have. And there's a few minutes.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you want to add? What do you want people to know when they ask you about what happened?

Reva Oks: Well, [unintelligible 0:23:03.3].

Interviewer: Do you tell them of the coal mines?

Reva Oks: Yeah. The coal mines [unintelligible 0:23:14.5].

Interviewer: When they asked you what happened, what do you think about the most?

Reva Oks: The coal mines.

Interviewer: The coal mines.

Reva Oks: And later they sent us in the forest.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Female: You got malaria, didn't you?

Reva Oks: I was very, very sick. Yeah, but my sister [unintelligible 0:23:41.2], but I come out. I don't know, but [unintelligible 0:23:53.8].

Interviewer: Yeah.

Female: [Unintelligible 0:24:01.9] anything?

Reva Oks: Uh-huh?

Female: Did you?

Interviewer: He did. He already did it. OK.

Reva Oks:

[Unintelligible 0:24:12.6], but thank God. Later, my sister got her husband. He [unintelligible 0:24:27.6] because the children really [unintelligible 0:24:34.9] for Russia [unintelligible 0:24:39.3] go into Israel to [unintelligible 0:24:47.2] the children into [unintelligible 0:24:49.1]. We've been [unintelligible 0:24:56.6]. And later, my brother was in the paper, for my sister, and she go [unintelligible 0:25:09.6] and I stayed in Germany. Later, [unintelligible 0:25:22.3]. We stayed over there. We came in 1946 in Germany. Yeah, in 1947, I got you.