

**Transcript:**

Fridericka Saharovici

A25

17m45s

Interviewer: You were not in a camp?

Fridericka Saharovici: No.

Interviewer: Not in a camp. OK, so tell me--

Fridericka Saharovici: I was--

Interviewer: --a little bit about Romania and growing up.

FriderickaSaharovici: I was born in Romania in a small city. You might call it a shtetel called Targu Neamt in the province of Moldova. There were, at the time, like 10,000 people in that city, 3,000 of them were Jews. So, about 40% of the population was Jewish. My family on both sides, my mother's and father's, have lived there for many generations. Jews were very prominent in the city, very well known, and very respected citizens of the city before the war. My mother's family traces her background to the biblical commentator, Rashi. My mother had a parchment that was passed on from generation to generations. The sons wrote about their fathers, and that's how we know that it goes back to Rashi. They were all rabbis, very well known. It's one of the best-documented family in the Jewish family in Israel. Several books came out about my mother's family, the Rappaport family, and we have this family tree, a copy of this family tree going to 1100. So, they have lived there for many generations before the war. My grandfather was an ordained rabbi, the first known practicing rabbi

in the family. He had an import-export cotton business. And we lived a very nice, almost idyllic life, pastoral, in a small city, beautiful city where several of the Romanian writers came from. It was really a very sheltered life, and that's why, at the beginning, I said, I was a sheltered child. I was 11. But thinking more – you get older, you start thinking of many things – it came back to me, many of the things that I suffered and my family during the war. When the Nazis occupied Romania, they took my parent's business. It was a decree called the Romanization. Everything that a Romanian wanted, he could ask for and get it. If he wanted your business, he would ask for your business and he would get your business. So, we were thrown out of the house. Somebody wanted my parent's business and moved in and took their business. So, we moved in another place. I wore the yellow star as a child.

Interviewer: As a child wearing that yellow star, did you really recognize what you were doing?

Fridericka Saharovici: It was very scary. The parents would sit there and listen to radio under covers because they were afraid that the police will find out that they are listening to radio. Every day you heard about another city. Moldova was on the list of places where Jews were sent to concentration camps. They just did not get to us on time. We'd probably have been in the next echelon. If the war would not have ended when it ended, we would have ended up in a concentration camp. As it turned out, in 1944, when the Russian, the front came to 3 kilometers from my hometown and they took all the Jews from the city. Everybody already has evacuated the city because they could move freely from one place to the other. Jews could not go anywhere. So, we were trapped there. We heard the cannon. The front was coming right at the edge of town, and that is when they took all the Jews and they told us you will be moved from your town to another small town called Buhuși which was about maybe 40 miles from Targu Neamt. And they put us on a forced march. We walked for several days. I don't remember how many. 5:43

Interviewer: You were how old?

Fridericka Saharovici:

I was 11 years old. Few people had like a horse and a wagon and so we walked and people who had a horse or a little wagon would ask the rabbi to come and ride with them. And I remember the old rabbi who was a very learned man, a good friend of my grandfather, said, "As long as poor people and sick people walk, I am going to walk. I cannot in good conscience ride in anybody's wagon. I'm going to walk." And he walked into Buhuși and walked on this march. And we were liberated by the Russians in that city. As it turned out, the front stopped at the edge of Targul Neamt and they fought there for six months. So, we were gone for six months from the city. When we came back, all the city was destroyed. Everything that we left behind was looted or destroyed. Some people, Romanian from the city, could stay there in the villages nearby and they came and helped themselves to everything in the houses. So, we were liberated from Buhuși in 1944. My father was taken during the war before 1944 in Targul Neamt as a hostage along with 17 other leaders of the Jewish communities and they were kept hostages and they said that if any Jews in the city tries to escape, leave the city, move somewhere else. One of them will be shot for everybody that leaves. So, I remember how scary it was as a child, especially the first night, it's still in my mind. When my mother took me, we were scared. They took dad. We didn't know where they took him and they said, "Tonight, we are going to shoot them." And we were listening to guard saying this. They said this for our benefit, to hear it. They didn't intend to shoot them. They knew that they took them as hostages, but they were cruel and told us. So here I was a little child, didn't sleep the whole night, we couldn't... We had a curfew at 7 o'clock at night and you couldn't be on the street, so we went there and had to go home and waited in the morning to find my father is there. They didn't kill him. He was sent to a labor camp. Then, he came back to Targu Neamt and went to Buhuși where the Russians, yes, and the Russians liberated us in Buhuși.

Interviewer:

He was sent to a labor camp.

Fridericka Saharovici:

Yes.

Interviewer: So he was not killed.

Fridericka Saharovici: No. And both...I did not have brothers and sisters, so my family survived. Both parents survived and myself, and actually, when we emigrated to the United States, they came with us into Memphis.

Interviewer: Tell me about the day of liberation. Do you remember them?

Fridericka Saharovici: Yes, I do. I remember that a good friend of mine, her mother was Russian, and I will never forget, she was originally from Bessarabia where they spoke Russian. So she spoke fluently Russian and never learned proper Romanian, and she taught us how to say "welcome." So, I did not forget to this day how to say welcome in Russian. And we came out of the basement where we were hiding when we heard that they were coming and everybody went on the street very happy. And we told them Horosho! And three hours later, we heard that they are raping women, the Russian soldiers, so we went back in the basement and they are raping there, they are stealing the people's watches. So, we went back into the basement.

Interviewer: These are the same soldiers--

Fridericka Saharovici: --that liberated--

Interviewer: Your husband just told us--

Fridericka Saharovici: Yes.

Interviewer: --was passing out chocolate at camps.

Fridericka Saharovici: Yes.

Interviewer: How do you explain that?

Fridericka Saharovici: Some of them, not every Russian raped and not every Russian--

Interviewer: You're the second survivor today that told us about the raping. How do you explain how...What was happening that you know of? Some of them were passing out chocolate to help survivors and some were raping them.

Fridericka Saharovici: Some of them I'm sure passed chocolates in Buhuși to children. There were people who passed chocolates and there were people who raped women and there were people who stole watches and there were people who gave maybe a present to a young child. But when we heard that they are raping again and stealing, we rushed back and didn't come out of the basement for another three days until things quieted down.

Interviewer: When you came out of the basement, how was everything?

Fridericka Saharovici: We were very happy, very happy that the war was over for us. My father wanted to move to Bucharest. He did not want to go back to Targu Neamt. So, he said, as soon as things quiet down, I'm going to Bucharest and we will move there and my mother and they sent me to another city where I could take an exam to go to the next class. And my mother moved everything back to Targu Neamt and they remained in Targu Neamt until they left for the United States. When dad came back from Bucharest, mother already has moved there because she had her family in the Targu Neamt.

Interviewer: Where did you meet Leonid?

Fridericka Saharovici: I went to Bucharest to the university and when I graduated, I needed somebody at the Department of Education and he was working for the Department of Education. It's a long story, but in Romania, when you graduated, they would send you in another city or a village or wherever that they wanted to, but they said if you find the job. My degree was in organic chemistry and I found the job, but I didn't want to go and tell them I found the job. I was afraid they will give it to somebody else. Romania by that time, it was communist so we live through the Nazis and then we live through the communist. We got our education through the communist period. At the same time, he was working as an assistant professor in the law school and I had a friend and assistant professor there and she sent me to him. Maybe, he could help me get officially the job that I found. And that's how I met him.

Interviewer: Well, he got you more than a job--

Fridericka Saharovici: I was going to come back the next day, and he told a friend, "Come, I think I met the girl that I'm going to marry." And come back the second day to meet her. And we married a year later.

Interviewer: A year later. And you've been married how many years?

FriderickaSaharovici: 47 years.

Interviewer: How many children do you have?

Fridericka Saharovici: We have two children and five grandchildren.

Interviewer: Wow. Mazeltov. When you look back at this time... luck? What do you think? How did you survive it? How did you get by?

Fridericka Saharovici: Absolutely lucky. As I said, if the war were to have been maybe three months, Targu Neamt was next in line to go to the concentration camp and I don't know if we would have survived or not. No, it was just pure luck. It was luck for us to come here because under the communist, you couldn't come, so it's –

Interviewer: When you're talking about this, what do you want people to know?

Fridericka Saharovici: First of all, I want people to hear this experience because there are so many spots in the world now that – it's war – that people hate each other, that people cannot live with each other, that they should learn from our experience, and maybe create a little better world. No, I'm not going to speak in schools. I think I've made...each one has strengths and weaknesses. I came back and because my mother was a big Zionist and the leader in the Zionist Movement in Romania, I gave my time to Hadassah. I was the president of Memphis Hadassah Chapter. I was on the region's board. Each one of us makes his contributions in a different way and because I was not in a concentration camp, I let my husband speak about these and I'm making my contribution in other ways.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Let me ask you about that. Do you feel like you're not really a survivor 'cause you weren't in a camp?

Fridericka Saharovici: I felt like this for a long time until...but I was going with him to all the reunions and now, I don't feel this way anymore. I feel that we survive the war and it's nobody else to tell the story. We are the one left, and when we will be gone, if we don't say it, and if we don't leave our legacy, people will not know it.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

FriderickaSaharovici: No.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Fridericka Saharovici:

But...