

In the summer of 1941 we lived in Odessa Ukraine, a beautiful Black Sea port city with large Jewish population. I was 6 years old. My dad worked as a lawyer. My mom, a nurse, temporarily staying home taking care of me and my 1-year old brother. We occupied a small apartment containing a large kitchen and a small bedroom. These were considered good living conditions since we didn't have to share this space with anyone.

In June 1941, my dad was drafted into the Soviet Army. With my father gone, my mother took my brother and me to spend the summer at her parent's house in Suraj Belarus, located on the border with Poland. My mother's parents were orthodox Jews. My mother's father was a forest ranger, and was well respected in the Jewish community. He had a house, a chicken farm, and a couple of cows. My mother's mother was a heavy woman in her 60s. When we travelled from Odessa to Suraj, we took with us just enough clothes and things to last through the summer.

On June 22 1941, in the middle of the night, Nazi Germany attacked Soviet Union on the Ukrainian border where we were staying. Soviet soldiers were retreating past Suraj as the Nazis were approaching. My mom was concerned that if Nazis find out her husband serves in the Soviet Army they will kill us, so she decided to run away. She asked the retreating Soviet soldiers to let us join them, so we could escape. She was able to convince her mother to flee with us. But my mother's father refused to leave his farm. My mother's father was confident he would not be harmed by the Germans, since he remembered that the German soldiers that occupied his village in WWI were civilized.

The retreating Soviet soldiers let us (me, my brother and mother) ride in the back of one of many trucks fleeing the Nazi advance. While we were traveling in the back of the trucks, German airplanes constantly flew over us and periodically bombed and strafed us. Each time an aerial attack started, the Russian soldiers would grab me and my brother and run with us to an adjacent field overgrown with hay, corn and other vegetation. We would hide there until the bombing stopped. Since my grandmother was too old and heavy to run with us, she stayed in the truck, and my mom stayed with her. While we were taking cover in the fields, the Nazi airplanes would fly so low that I could see pilots' faces laughing. When I returned to the truck after each attack ended, I would fear not finding my mother and grandmother alive. After a few days the German army caught up with us. Some of the Russian soldiers escorting us were killed in a shootout; others ran into the woods and joined partisan units.

The Germans placed my family in a ghetto in a village Elyeno in Smolenski oblast Russia, where we lived in fear, bitter cold and starvation. Within the ghetto, my family stayed with other Jews in a one-room shack. The shack had no electricity, running water, toilet or bed. We slept on the floor. We had to wear yellow stars on our clothes. The other Jews would trade their belongings for food with the locals who entered the ghetto. Since my family brought only few items with us for our summer vacation, we had nothing to trade, so we were always very hungry.

The winter of 1941 was very cold, and we had no warm clothes, since we had packed for summer. At night, under the cover of darkness, my mother and other women would leave our shack and scavenge firewood. They would also, under cover of darkness in the freezing winter, enter fields in the ghetto to dig out frozen potatoes.

The ghetto was administered by guards – both German soldiers and local Ukrainians. The guards in the ghetto would sometimes pick a Jew at random and take him/her out to be executed. So we always tried to be inconspicuous, or hide if possible, whenever we saw a guard coming.

One time, the Nazis marched us out of the ghetto into a field to execute us. Just then, partisans attacked the Nazis, and we fled into the forest with the partisans. We begged the partisans to let us join them, but they refused to take an old woman and 2 children. Without protection from the partisans, and with no shelter against the bitter cold, our family had to return to the ghetto.

After 18 months in the ghetto, in the winter of 1942, the Soviet army broke through the Nazi lines in a bloody battle, and formed a temporary corridor through which we fled from the ghetto. The Soviet contingent that freed us brought us with them in trucks to Soviet-held territory.

In the Soviet-held territory, my mother worked as a nurse in a hospital taking care of wounded soldiers. One of the Jewish doctors in the hospital warned her to leave the area, since the Nazis will soon return and kill any Jews. Heeding his warning, our family was transported on a truck with wounded soldiers who were being evacuated away from the war zone. We arrived in the city of Mari in Turkmenistan. In Mari, my mom found her brother and sister, who both were doctors and worked at a hospital there.

My mother started working in that hospital in Mari, caring for wounded soldiers. For that, she received meager rations to feed our family. Her brother, a high-level doctor, used his official channels through Soviet army records, to locate my father. The records indicated my father had been severely wounded by shrapnel from a direct hit on a military vehicle that he was about to enter. Everyone in that vehicle was blown to pieces, and only those who had not yet entered the vehicle survived. My uncle arranged for my father, who was still in grave condition, to be transferred to his hospital. For about a year, my dad was bedbound and constantly cared for by my mother.

Being a family of a wounded soldier qualified us for daily rations of a bowl of soup and a slice of bread. Since my mother was constantly caring for my wounded father, my mother sent me (I was 8 years old) to walk to the soup kitchen daily and bring back the food rations. One time, neighborhood boys, who knew the route I took each day, waited in ambush for me to return with food from the soup kitchen and stole the food I was carrying. I came home with nothing, and was severely scolded by my mother for leaving family without the food. I felt very guilty, and avoided further ambushes by taking a different route every day.

In 1944, Ukraine was liberated. My father recovered from his wounds. He returned to our apartment in Odessa, to

find that it was occupied by Ukrainian neighbors who trashed our belongings. They explained to my father that they thought our family would never return, since almost all Jews were killed.

Since our home in Odessa was taken over by Ukrainians, my father travelled his birthplace, Nemirov, near Vinnitsa, where his parents and older siblings (he was the youngest of 13) had lived before the war. My father discovered that most of his 12 siblings and their children and grandchildren (over 30 family members in all) had been killed by Nazis. Among them were my father's 21 year old niece and her 2-month-old baby, who were both tortured to death when Nazis were informed that her husband joined the partisans. Also among them was my father's older brother who was drafted and killed in battle when he was ordered to attack German tanks while on horseback. That brother's wife and 3 children (i.e., my aunt and 3 cousins) had been evacuated as a family of a soldier and so survived the war. But the widow had a hard time supporting 3 kids on her own (the youngest daughter was just a couple of years older than I was). So, my father let my aunt and cousins join us.

Then my father travelled to Suraj Belorussia to try to find my grandfather, and see if the family can move there. But my father found that my grandfather, too, was murdered along with the other Jews in Suraj, and that my grandfather's house and farm were destroyed.

We then found that the only city in which members of our family survived was Vinnitsa Ukraine, where my grandmother's sister had lived before the war. My grandmother's sister's husband and 19 year old son both vanished on the front lines in the war. My grandmother's sister had a big 4-room house to herself and nobody to live with her. My grandmother's sister found a couple of her nephews who were of the same age as her son and survived the war. Their parents were killed and their house was destroyed. So she asked them to move in with her. My grandmother's sister invited us, too, to move in with her. So my family moved to Vinnitsa. Our family of 6 (my grandmother, my parents, my brother, my aunt and cousins, and I) lived in the biggest room of the house, having to share the kitchen only with our extended family members. In Vinnitsa, my father worked as a lawyer. My mother worked in a medical office.

My grandmother moved to Khmilnitsky and lived there for the last 7 years of her life.

I attended medical school in Kazan Tatarstan, and returned to Vinnitsa to work as a pediatrician and later as a nursing school professor. I married an engineer. We have two children, Eugene and Svetlana.

Keeping of Judaism was forbidden in the Soviet Union.

We immigrated to America as soon as the Soviets permitted us to leave. It took 6 years from the time we applied for permission to leave the Soviet Union to the time we arrived in America.