

GRUENBAUM, Laura
Re: RELATIVES: ABRAHAM AND HANNA ELLENBOGEN
RG-50.233*0051
June 1992
Rockville, Maryland

Abstract

Laura Gruenbaum, born in 1911, discusses her brother Abraham, who was born January 17, 1908 in Rozwadów. The family built a six-room house outside of Rozwadów about two years before World War I. Abraham was sent to gymnasium in Czechowice, and then attended university in Krakow. Although he had the best grades, as a Jew, he was not admitted to medical school in Poland, so he attended medical school in Prague for a year or two. He returned to Poland and attended law school in Krakow. He had a thriving general law practice at the family home outside of Rozwadów for two years before the Germans invaded Poland.

When they learned of the German invasion, Abraham, their sister Hanna, and a brother went to Russian-controlled Lvov, a four or five hour train ride. They walked and rode on a horse-drawn wagon part of the way.

Germans later evicted Laura and her parents from their house, and they headed toward Lvov. "Nobody knows where to go...It was just a terrible thing to live it through," Laura says.

They found Laura's brothers and sisters in Lvov, and lived together. After a few weeks or months, Russians took Laura and her parents from the house, and sent them to Russia. Abraham and Hanna were out at their jobs. The Russians had given Abraham an office job. He moved in with a friend.

In 1940 or 1941, Russians sent away rich Poles and others in cattle cars.

After the war, Laura found the woman with whom Abraham had lived.. She told Laura that Abraham said a man had warned him that the Russians were coming for him. He said he would not sleep at her apartment that night. Neither she nor anyone else ever saw him again.

Question: If you could just state the names and date of birth and place of birth.

Answer: Of those two, this is my brother so he would be now – he was born in 1908.

Q: Do you remember his birthday?

A: Yeah, 17 of January. I still remember. (indistinct)

Q: What was your brother's full name?

A: Abraham. I think he had only one---Roman place by Polish. {Different female voice: Oh, that's Abraham in Polish?} Yeah. He has to have a Polish name.

Q: And he was born in Rozwadów?

A: Yes.

Q: So you were born in 1911, so he was three years older than you are? And he's the eldest in the family?

A: Yes. But my sister is older than I am.

Q: You had a sister in between your older brother and yourself? What was her name?

A: Her name is Clara.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your brother, what you remember about him from your childhood? What was he like as a little boy?

A: Like every little boy. When he was 10, 11 years old and he finished public school so my parents send him in a bigger town where they have a gymnasium. That means a high school like here. Because they were family so he was there and he finished school there.

Q: Which town was the school in, do you remember?

A: Yeah. Czechowice.

Q: Czechowice.

A: You know how to spell it?

Q: I think so. Let me see, C-z-. I'm totally wrong. {You can never tell.} How would you spell? I was going to say C-z-e- but you started me on R so--. That's all right, that's all right. S-z-o-w-. So it's C-z-e-s-z-o-w? I wouldn't even presume to pronounce it because I don't know Polish. But you said Czeszow? Czeszoff (ph)?

A: Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

Q: Good. Do you remember if your brother--? Were there youth organizations or any clubs that he was involved in when he was younger?

A: I imagine so.

Q: Were there any in your town, in Rozwadów?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Yes?

A: That he was involved in?

Q: No, no. Because he wasn't very—he was there until he finished and then he went to a university which was Cracow.

A: Do you remember when he went to the university, how old he was?

Q: When he finished high school – he was 18. This was the picture—that's what he was when he finished. You see, they have to wear in the higher grades, uniforms.

A: When he was away in Czechowice, studying at the gymnasium, did he live there?

Q: Yes. With the family.

A: He lived there for the entire school year?

Q: Yes.

A: So he rented a room from the family? Or did he stay with a--?

Q: No, he stayed with--.

A: So only he came home during the summertime?

Q: No, for holidays too.

A: For holidays also?

{Other voice: Did they do any sports or anything?} When he come home, I don't know. He wasn't really a sportsman. He was quiet, good student.

Q: Did he like to read?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: When he was studying in the gymnasium and also public school, what subjects did he like, do you remember? No? Was he interested in like history or science, or--?

A: Maybe history.

Q: What did he study at the university? He studied law?

A: Oh, no. He wants to be a doctor but you know it was numerous clouds in Poland. So Jews they wouldn't take, _____ (50), I don't know what. Because marks he has the best but he wasn't accepted. So my parents sent him to Czechoslovakia, to Prague, in a medical school. He was there only a year or two, I don't remember exactly.

Q: Before the war broke out?

A: Yeah, this was before the war.

Q: You said only a year or two before the war. That's when he went to Prague?

A: No, this was longer than--. He was only, who remembers the dates? Sorry, I cannot remember the dates but I know that he was there only a year or two. He came back and he went to law school in Prague. Finished the university.

Q: So he went to medical school for a year or two and then came back and went to law school in Cracow?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Let me ask you, your parents, what did your father do for a living?

A: {He wants you to tell him for the tape.} He was like in wholesale business. They have in the—how you call them—the big farmers, they have lots of things. They make their own whiskey. They have their things. The produce and the machines and everything. But there were places in Poland that they had more than now it—a place, or now an estate or something. So he was going there and buying like variants (76). A big amounts, ten tons, I don't know. For those people, that was much cheaper than to buy there because they didn't have in the industrial (81) state where we were living. So that's what it was. He was always on the go.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your house and what kind of street you lived on?

A: The house—we lived not far from a town. But the rest years—

Q: So you lived a little bit outside of Rozwadów?

- A: Yes, yes. So the last two years, no more than two years, my parents decided that they sold everything and they moved to Rozwadów. Built a house, two years before, this I know, two years before the war. But he was still in the same business like he was buying big amounts of grain and he makes, he rent a mill and he makes flour for the bakeries. Around the thing, Rozwadów and other places, that needed, the stores and the bakers. So this was until the war.
- Q: Do you remember what street you lived on in Rozwadów when you moved?
- A: Yes, Panska. P-a-n-s-k-a.
- Q: Was it a big house or a medium house or--?
- A: Was six rooms. Yeah. He opened in that house and he finished in high school and he opened an office in the house.
- Q: Opened an office in the house? I see. Did your brother ever live in this house?
- A: He did.
- Q: He did? How long before the war did your brother start law school in Cracow, do you remember? A few years or—not pretty shortly before the war? Not too long before the war?
- A: I know that he finished law school, the house. He had to help practice with a lawyer. He was two years with the lawyer. After this, he opened a law for himself. What year, do you want to know?
- Q: So he had finished law school and was already a practicing lawyer before the war?
- A: Yeah, yeah. He was a practicing lawyer.
- Q: That's what I wanted to know. Do you remember, what his office in Rozwadów? Yes. Do you remember where it was in the city?
- A: On the same street what I told you.
- Q: The same street your house was on?
- A: Yeah. {I thought the office was *in* the house.} Yeah, that's right.
- Q: His office was in the family home?
- A: {Was in the house, right.}

- Q: Now you said your father had an office also in your house?
- A: He don't have an office because this was really an outside business.
- Q: Must have been a pretty busy house. Did your brother have lots of clients?
- A: Yes, he had a very good practice.
- Q: Do you remember what kind of law he was practicing? Did he deal mostly with agricultural problems or--?
- A: No, everything. He had a good name as a good lawyer in that two years. Those people that my father was dealing came to him as a lawyer also.
- Q: For legal advice?
- A: I remember we didn't have a telephone before the war. Because he was a lawyer, so he has to have a telephone. Very few people has a telephone.
- Q: So he got one for the house?
- A: For his office.
- Q: Did he get married before the war?
- A: No.
- Q: No? Was he dating anyone before the war, do you remember?
- A: He was too busy.
- Q: Sounds like a lawyer, yeah. You said all this happened before the war—how long before the war, do you remember? How long did his practice run before the war started?
- A: The two years.
- Q: Just two years? Let me go back just a little bit to when both you and your brother were born. Before WWI and I'm trying to get a grasp for where Rozwadów was. I'm trying to remember on the map. I've looked it up several times but I can't remember. Was that part of Poland under Russian rule?
- A: Austria.
- Q: Austrian rule? Okay. Did your father fight in the war, in World War I?

- A: He was in Russia, no. He was in Russia four years. {But he was a prisoner, so he did fight.} But he didn't fight. {But he was a soldier.} Yeah, they took him. He was a soldier because he didn't have any choice, they took him and make him a soldier. Too bad I don't have the pictures, he showed the pictures as a soldier.
- Q: He had pictures of himself in uniform?
- A: Oh, yeah, yeah. Very nice. From 14 to 18, he was in Russia.
- Q: Did your brother--, before WWII, I know that Poland had a compulsory military service?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Did your brother serve in the military?
- A: No.
- Q: No? Was there a reason for that or--?
- A: I don't know what it was. I think he didn't have good eyes, good enough for a soldier.
- Q: Can you tell me a little bit about when the war started, what your brother was doing, what happened when the Germans invaded Poland?
- A: What happened was known to everybody that the German coming in the town. They start from the—how you say it—from the doctors, lawyers, businessmen--.
- Q: They came for them first?
- A: Yeah and everybody knows that. First thing, he had a sign over the house. So that sign we had to take off.
- Q: So they knew he was a lawyer?
- A: Yeah and then they take out, right away they take him. That's what they did in Lvov. He and my sister and my younger brother left the house when it was known that the German come in already in the town.
- Q: Oh, so they decided to leave before they knew what the Germans would do?
- A: Yeah, yeah. Then they were going, just walk to Lvov. You know where this stands to Lvov. Well, it's further, even with the train you have to go four or five hours. So it took them, I don't know. My sister went and my younger brother with him. {Your sister, Clara.}
- Q: They all walked to Lvov?

A: Yeah. How they managed, I can't tell you. It wasn't too pleasant but they came to Lvov. In Lvov, was already the Russians.

Q: The Russians were already in Lvov?

A: But the Russians were the good guys comparing with the Germans what they did to the people.

Q: Do you remember what day or how long after the invasion started, the Germans came to Rozwadów?

A: Not more than a week.

Q: Not more than a week? Do you remember if your brother ever talked about being frightened or anybody in your family being frightened about what was going on in Germany before they invaded?

A: No, no. Nobody knew.

Q: Nobody really knew anything?

A: Nobody expected.

Q: Did your father say anything about the Germans--?

A: About the Russians, you mean?

Q: No, no. About the Germans since he may have fought with them during the war, did he have anything to say about the Germans or--? Do you remember what he thought about the Germans at all?

A: I don't know. Nobody talked too much about it.

Q: The reason I asked is that some people often say that their parents said that all the Germans were nice people, they had known them before the war and that kind of a thing?

A: Yeah, that they, yeah.

Q: They wouldn't do, you know, the things that they were accused of?

A: No, no, they wouldn't do it. They said the same thing.

Q: So we have your brother and your sister and your younger brother walked, I would imagine several weeks, to get to Lvov?

- A: They didn't have time, several weeks. I don't know.
- Q: But they made it to Lvov somehow?
- A: Yeah. {Maybe they got rides with people going.} Oh, yeah, yeah. It was that people that my father was doing business, they have another place on the other side in Poland. So they have a son and that son run away too. Going, my brother met him on the way just like that. He went with a wagon and horses so he have them a ride. That what ____ .
- Q: But they didn't plan to meet? They just happened to meet on the road?
- A: Yeah, that's right.
- Q: So they went to Lvov. Do you know what they were doing there?
- A: In Lvov, we have friends and they have apartment. So the first thing they have a place to go in till they find out; they will think what to do. But they were staying there for a few weeks. In the meanwhile, the Germans came and told us to get out.
- Q: From your—from Rozwadów?
- A: From our house. So we start to go in the same direction. I don't know why they are because when they left, they didn't know where they go and we didn't know where they go.
- Q: Oh, so they didn't have a specific plan to go to Lvov? They were just running to the East?
- A: No, from other towns they run to Rozwadów. From Rozwadów, they—nobody knows where to go or why they go. It was just a terrible thing to live it through. What else you want to know?
- Q: Did you--? Now you were with your parents, right? Was it just you and your parents or other people?
- A: My younger sister.
- Q: Your younger sister? And what's her name again?
- A: Anna.
- Q: Anna.
- A: {No, it's Hanna.}
- Q: Oh, Hanna.

A: Hanna is Yiddish.

Q: And you all also went to Lvov? Did you get there from rides or did you go on a train?

A: We came to a little town and there we find out that a train is going, the last train goes out for that little town. So we head, I think, a ride into Lvov here.

Q: When you all came to Lvov, did you meet up with your brother and your other brother and sister?

A: Yeah, we met. Not right away because we have to stop in another town that the train didn't go exactly to Lvov.

Q: You didn't know that they were in Lvov, did you?

A: No, no but through people. So there were apartments and even those people were running from Lvov too so they left the apartment. So we had an apartment. Apartment! One room.

Q: One room for the four of you? And your older brother lived in a different apartment near you, or-?

A: In the same building.

Q: In the same building?

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me what the Russians were doing in Lvov? Were there any restrictions on you as to what--?

A: Don't ask, the Russians was not--. First thing they take everything what they saw to take. Because they had, they didn't have to pay. They went and nationalists—{nationalized} nationalized and it was stamped, they are coming and taking whatever they want.

Q: Did your brother try to start to work or was there anything to do?

A: He was working, they gave him a job.

Q: The Russians did?

A: The Russians did, yeah.

Q: So he was practicing as a lawyer again?

A: No. He worked in an office.

Q: Was he doing clerical work or--?

- A: I don't know, I can't tell you. But that, they did him a big favor. Because if they know, the Russians would, a few weeks later, two or three weeks later, the Russians came and took us to Russia. If he would be home, maybe he would go to Russia too.
- Q: But he wasn't home when they came?
- A: He was working and my sister too.
- Q: How long did you stay there before you left? How long were they were? Do you remember?
- A: Who you mean?
- Q: Before the Russians took you from Lvov?
- A: Just a few weeks, maybe two or three weeks or maybe months. Could be a few months, it's too hard to remember all those things.
- Q: Do you know what happened to your brother after you left?
- A: No. My brother was, he had a friend, not a friend he knew because she was an older lady already but she has apartment. Somehow he got her address and he was there, he lived there for a short time. He was working. Then after the war, I was talking to that woman and she says that one evening--. They knew that Russians taken already the people in the trains, not the trains, the cattle cars.
- Q: Taken out the Poles?
- A: Huh?
- Q: Taking the Poles from--?
- A: The Poles also, the rich people first. First went the rich people. She says he came one evening and she said that somebody told him that they will come for him. He asked her to give him a blanket and a pillow that he has to—he wouldn't sleep there that night. She never saw him again and nobody saw him again.
- Q: Would this have been in 1939 still?
- A: No, this would be in '40 or '41. {Didn't it say in that article in the book, didn't it say how he was working though when he was in Lvov? He was working to help other people.} Yeah, in that book. {It might be useful for you to have that, if you can, to have it translated.}
- Q: Sure, talking about what he was doing in Lvov?

A: { Yeah, before the war. I think that's why, in fact, they had an individual--. Not before the war, during the war. I think that's why, in fact, he's got that individual article in there, I don't know. I don't remember it that clearly but he was working to help other people to get out or do different kinds off—to save themselves in some way. In the process, somehow, he was caught up.} Helped the people, he sent in food to them. {Yeah, but that's what he did and it does talk about that in the article.} This is a very nice article. {If you think you had it translation, could you send me a copy of the translation?}