KDRG YVA-141

Testimony of Josef Rojzman, Born in Borki, Poland, 1875, Regarding His Experiences in Radzivilov, the Brody Ghetto, and in Hiding in the Home of a Polish Family

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Translated from Yiddish by Theodore Steinberg

Edited by Ellen Garshick, April 2025

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Country: Poland **Language:** Yiddish

Witness: Yosef Royzman **Address:** B'nei Brak, Hulda Haneviya 25

Place and date of birth: Borki village, Kremenets district, Poland, 1875

Residence at the outbreak of the war / events described: An old man, observer of the commandments from Radzivilov, on how he was rescued and lost his family

Information on the Radzivilov community at the end of the 19th century and in the period between the two world wars, as well as during Soviet rule until the outbreak of war in June 1941; the first acts against the Jews after the Germans' entry—abuse by the Germans and the local population of Jews, especially bearded men; the burning of the synagogue over the Torah scrolls and the rabbi ordered to dance around the scroll; the establishment of the ghetto after Shavuot 1942; rumors about the liquidation of the surrounding Jews and the witness's departure from the ghetto in Radzivilov; in Brody with his daughter and son until the establishment of the ghetto; escape to a farmer before the ghetto was closed; in hiding until after Passover 1943—attack and death of his son and daughter with their families. On the way and his rescue is by a "miracle"; the old man's wanderings as a helper among the trees of the villages and settlements and finding refuge in hiding with a farmer named Pasieka, observing kashrut by the witness; liberation in summer 1944—help from soldiers and Red Army officers, including Jews—construction of a bathhouse for a group of Jewish survivors to take a hot bath by the Dubno military commander; repatriation to Poland with a group of Radzivilov survivors in 1945; escape from there after the pogrom in Kielce, wanderings in Austria, Italy; his arrival in Israel in 1949.

Names mentioned in the testimony: Pasieka

Places mentioned in the testimony: Radzivilov, Kremenets, Shumsk, Dubno, Brody, Krakow; Linz, Budapest

Tel Aviv, September 1962, 13 pages
Taken by Y. Alperovitsh

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Summary

The testimony of Yosef Royzman, a deeply moving description of a Jew from Radzivilov who survived the occupation years in difficult, inhuman conditions.

Royzman was 66 years old when the German-Soviet War broke out on January 22, 1941.

A religiously inclined Jew, a former merchant and prominent resident of Radzivilov was transformed into a beggar during the war.

Before World War II, Royzman led a fine life, was active in Jewish community life in the town, and was greatly respected by the Jewish and Christian population in his neighborhood. He was one of four elected councilmen from the Jewish community in the town hall.

He also headed the religious *Linat Hatsedek* [a charitable organization].

Royzman had a large family: a wife and nine children. His wife died in 1923, and from then on he bore the yoke of earning a living and raising the children. All of his children were tragically killed at the hands of the Nazi murderers.

His fate was such that in 1943 he was already alone, defenseless, directionless. He went from village to village, from one forest to another in hostile surroundings, where every step threatened a Jew with death.

Hungry, desolate, in snow, cold, and rain, he would knock on a Christian's window with his aged, trembling hand, begging for a piece of bread to sustain his life or a place to spend the night. In the best case, when he had a human encounter with a peasant who gave him a piece of bread, he would be told, "Get away from here quickly. No one has noticed you." In other cases, murderous hands would threaten him, prepared to kill him, hoping to find money on him, or perhaps just out of Jew hatred.

The peasants around Radzivilov knew him. Many had been his customers before the war, and he had done business with others. When they would encounter him, many were surprised that the old "Yoske" was still alive at a time when all the Jews of Poland were already long before in the ground. In others he elicited a pitiful feeling; but in an atmosphere of Jew hatred, he found no one who was willing to risk his life for him.

Then he would come upon people with good, warm hearts who had pure, human attitudes. They would give him food, allow him to spend a couple of nights in a barn. In other cases, they would warn him of danger.

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He even found a peasant, Pasieka, who hid him for 10 whole months in a cellar and gave him food, with no payment, at a time when Germans would come and threaten terrible punishments to a Christian who was found hiding Jews. The peasant Pasieka should certainly be in the honorable ranks of the Righteous of the World.

Sitting in the cellar in suffocating, damp air, even in such inhuman conditions he refused to eat nonkosher food, and he took only bread, potatoes, and greens from the peasant.

As a believing Jew, he had heartfelt trust that the One Above would help him through all his troubles. This faith strengthened him and gave him courage in every dangerous moment, even when he was on the verge of death.

Yosef Royzman is now an aged man, 87 years old. As he related his experiences, he made great efforts. His memory was weak. He could not remember dates and often forgot names and families, except for the most obvious that were engraved in his memory. His current wife helped him tell his story. She is younger than he is, and he had told her about his experiences earlier.

In telling about his children who had been killed, he forgot his son Yechezkel's name. He simply could not remember his name. He wept, hit his head with his fists, and broke out in a cold sweat until he finally remembered and could breathe more easily. His retelling was chaotic, but my pointed questions directed him to various episodes in during the occupation of Radzivilov that I knew from other witnesses ([Yitschak] Vaynshteyn, [Yechiel] Porokhovnik, [Ite] Gun).[1]

In transcribing this testimony, I tried to capture his mode of speaking, his style, and his expression, as I heard them.

Yitschak Alperovitsh

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Yosef Royzman

Date and place of birth: 1875, Borki village, Kremenets district

Occupation: (formerly a merchant)—now retired

Address: B'nei Brak, Hulda Haneviya Street 25, #3

Those of his family killed in World War II—children:

1. Daughter—Rishe Royzman, born 1901, date and place unknown
2. Daughter—Sore Royzman, born 1903, killed Shavuot 1943
3. Daughter—Sheve Royzman, born 1905, killed Shavuot 1943
4. Daughter—Reyzel Royzman, born 1907, killed Shavuot 1943
5. Daughter—Kenye Royzman, born 1909, killed beginning of 1943
6. Son—Avraham Royzman, born 1906, killed beginning of 1943
7. Son—Yakov Royzman, born 1908, killed beginning of 1943
8. Son— Yechezkel Royzman, born 1918, killed beginning of 1943

[1] Testimonies by these three survivors are published in *Radzivilov: Sefer zikaron,* edited by: Ya'acov Adini (Tel Aviv, 1966). An English translation is online at the JewishGen Yizkor Book Project (https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Radzivilov/Radzivilov.html).

Yosef Royzman relates:

I was born in Borki village, Kremenets district, in 1875.

My father, R' Avraham Royzman, had a mill in the village, and he leased an inn from the local landowner. My father died in 1885, and the landowner evicted us from the inn and gave an order that he would never again lease inns to Jews. After my father's death, my family went to Kremenets. I was then a boy of 10, and I studied in a cheder. Later I went to Shumsk and I was apprenticed to a shingle maker. After that I worked at various other jobs: in an inn, in a sugar warehouse under Shumski. I worked at the warehouse for four years. At first I earned 15 rubles a year, later 20, then 25 and 30. I worked very hard.

My mother saw that I didn't look well, and she took me to a doctor. The doctor said that this work was beyond my strength and I should rest. I was idle for a while, and then I went to work in a food store. I worked there until I was conscripted.

In 1896 I was called to the conscription committee. I received a discharge and was given the number 321.

The Proskurov rabbi advised me to leave Kremenets so that I would no longer be subject to conscription. I left for Yekaterinoslav (today Dnieprovetrovsk) and there I worked for a year and five months in a warehouse for Avraham Maydonski. Avraham Maydonski had a big warehouse, and I would distribute various merchandise to merchants. I had a good position with him; and in the time I worked for him, I earned 300 rubles. I got a house in Kremenets and lived with my sister.

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In 1898 I married Gite Laber (who died in 1923), and I started a glassware business in Radzivilov.

Things did not go badly for me, and I earned a living. My wife and I had nine children, all now in the other world—the Germans killed them.

You ask me to tell you about Jewish life in Radzivilov. That would take a long time, and I don't have the strength to talk so long. And my memory is weak.

About 5,000 Jews lived in Radzivilov. I don't know exactly. The Jews were involved in business, and some were laborers. In the town there was a train station with a customs house, because not far away was the border between Radzivilov and Brody, which were then on either side of the general government. Among the societies were a Psalm Society, a Burial Society, a Charity Society. For many years I was in the Charity Society. We had four ritual slaughterers and one cantor. The rabbi, R' Yitschak Lerner of Radzivilov, as he was called, was a great scholar and Torah expert. He was known throughout the region, and people would come from surrounding towns to ask him questions about Jewish law.

Before the Polish times, four councilors were chosen from the Jewish community for the town government: Dubtshak the optician, the non-Orthodox rabbi Yakira, a man from Zlochow (I don't remember his name), and myself.

We would go to meetings and, along with the gentiles, consider city matters concerning business, taxes, cleanliness, and so on.

Peace between Jews and gentiles before Pilsudski's time was tolerable, but after his death, things got worse. The Poles opened Polish businesses and called on the gentiles to boycott Jewish businesses. Antisemitism grew worse day by day, but Jews lived in their own world. Competition was difficult. gentiles from the villages would do business with us.

You ask how the Jews reacted to the increasing antisemitism. What could we do? The Zionists called on the young people to go to the Land of Israel, and many went to kibbutzim. Of the "leftists," there weren't many in Radzivilov. They sympathized with the Bolsheviks. There would be more to tell, but suddenly the Polish-German war broke out. There was confusion, tumult. We suffered through horrors, because the Polish army was quickly overcome, and every day we awaited the Germans' arrival. Many who fled Poland came to us in Radzivilov. The Jewish community helped them with food and gave them a roof over their heads. They had fled the Germans emptyhanded and naked.

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Before the Soviet Period

The Bolsheviks came to us totally unexpectedly. We Jewish merchants knew this wouldn't be sweet for us, but they were better than the Germans. At least we knew that our lives would be secure.

At first the Bolsheviks ordered business to continue as it had before the Poles. Polish currency was equated with the ruble. The demand for goods increased. People grabbed up whatever they found in shops, especially the Soviets, because they had brought a lot of money.

We saw the policies become more difficult daily, and there was no new merchandise to purchase. We, the Jewish merchants, began to hold on to the best merchandise. But there was another problem. The Jewish militiamen knew what kind of merchandise we had and who had what. They harassed us, threatened us with arrest, and so on. And to threaten us, the Bolsheviks exiled some leading citizens—merchants. We lived in fear.

Furthermore, on orders from Russia, the Bolsheviks closed the study halls, and forbade ritual slaughter, circumcisions, and so on. We would pray and beg the Lord of the Universe quickly to send salvation.

Life under German Occupation

But the real trouble arose when the Germans arrived. The gentiles roused themselves. The Ukrainians, along with the Germans, would beat up Jews in the streets, steal goods and merchandise from our houses, and food as well, sugar. They would force the Jews to load those things in cars and then give them deadly blows.

Once the Germans came to my shop and made me open it. They took all of my remaining merchandise and distributed it among the gentiles. The Germans used to seize people with beards and pull them out, along with the flesh. Jews would tie up their beards in kerchiefs.

Once the German commander grabbed me in the street and wanted to cut my beard. He asked why I had a beard. I answered, “God told me to have a beard.” The answer seemed to please him, and he let me go in peace.

You ask what I did before the Germans. Before the ghetto was formed, I glazed windows for both Jews and gentiles. I had enough money from goods that I sold, besides which I still had some unsold merchandise. I could live on my surplus.

The German Decrees

At first the Germans ordered the Jews to wear white bands and blue Stars of David on their arms.

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Jews were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks. It was forbidden to leave the town without permission. Later on, the armbands were changed to yellow patches with a Stars of David on chests and backs.

One time the Germans and the Ukrainians burst into the Great Synagogue and threw the Torah scrolls into the street and burned them, then forced the rabbi, R’ Yitschak Lerner, of blessed memory, to dance around the fire.

From the *Judenrat,* the Germans demanded gold, money, food that the Jews had to bring to the commandant. Whoever did not obey this command would be shot.

In the Ghetto

After Shavuot in 1943, the Germans ordered the creation of a ghetto. Later the Germans ordered the ghetto to be divided between “essentials” and “nonessentials.” People like me, a worker who glazed windows, remained in the essential part. Five of my children were with me in the ghetto.

There were many problems in the ghetto. There was terrible crowding. Several families occupied each house. It was difficult to buy food. There were a variety of epidemics. Occasionally we received news that the Germans were killing Jews in neighboring cities. We understood that we, too, were marked for death and that sooner or later we would be killed. The division of the ghetto into essentials and nonessentials was also a hint that the Germans would spare the essentials.

I had two sons in Brody. One son, Avraham, had formerly had a good business and a nice apartment in Brody. He once came to me and said, “Dad, there is still no ghetto in Brody, so come there with me. A peasant will lead you across the border of the general government.” I paid him 500 zlotys, and so it was. My daughter and son-in-law had already left the Radzivilov ghetto.

I Leave the Radzivilov Ghetto

I left the Radzivilov ghetto before the first liquidation of the nonessential section. I took my prayer shawl and phylacteries. I took two plates of glass and slipped unnoticed out of the ghetto. It was already cold. I went to a peasant, who took me through a field, far away, until

he had led me to the woods. There he told me to continue through the woods until I came to Brody. I went to the cemetery to lament over my troubles and the Jews' troubles, and I begged of the Ruler of the World to give me strength to overcome this Gehenna.

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I went to my son Avraham and lived with him until in Brody they decided to create a ghetto. My daughter and son-in-law lived in Brody after leaving the Radzivilov ghetto.

At that time they were also killing the Jews of Radzivilov and the surrounding area. Brody was an exception. My son-in-law told me not to go into the ghetto because if the Germans were sparing the Jews in the ghetto, that was a sign that the killing would soon begin. Tsherkovski also advised me not to go into the ghetto.

Tsherkovski knew a certain gentile who lived near the woods. The gentile agreed to take us in. I left Brody with my children. We had Passover with the gentile. This was Passover 1943. At that time, the Soviets had liberated Kharkov. The gentile's sons worked for the Germans, so the peasant was afraid of keeping us, and he told us that we had to leave his hiding place. He also feared his neighbors, who might notice that he was hiding Jews. Not having any other choice, we left the peasant.

My son-in-law said, "There's no way out. We have to return to Brody and enter the ghetto." On the way, some thugs attacked us. One took out a revolver and shot by my son-in-law's ear. They demanded money. A gentile woman ran by and screamed, "Why are you shooting? We know these Jews from Radzivilov." She even gave me 300 zlotys. Her husband was an older policeman who worked for the Germans. The thugs left us alone.

On the way back to Brody we saw a group of Germans. The children hid in the rye and hid under a cherry tree. The Germans seized my children: my daughter Rishe and her husband, and my son Yechezkel with his wife and child. They took them to Brody, where they killed them.

I saw a German going back and forth, so I stayed under the cherry tree. He didn't see me. He left and returned with a tracking dog. The dog stayed with the German. I thought this marked my end, but God is a Father. The Master of the Universe directed the dog away from me, and the German left with his dog. I stayed under the tree until it grew dark.

That night I went to a gentile. When he saw me, he was shocked. "Get away from me. The Germans know every step." I went into a field and hid in the rye.

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What could I do? Where could I go? I decided to head for Radzivilov. "At least, " I thought, "I know many Christians there. Perhaps someone will hide me."

My heart hurt for my children. I remained all alone, homeless, without a roof over my head. As I went toward Radzivilov, I came to a village that I knew. I went to a peasant woman and begged for a piece of bread. She saw my situation and she said, "Give me 20 marks and I'll hide you in my barn." I gave her the money. I hid in that barn for a couple of days. On the

third day she came to me and said, “You have to leave. If you give me 500 marks, I’ll hide you for another couple of weeks.”

I didn’t have any money, so I had to leave. Where could I go? I went to the train station. As I passed a village, I ran into some peasants who recognized me. They were surprised that I was alive, because the Jews had been killed a while ago. “Yoske is still alive?” They mocked me and I quickly left.

I knocked on a window and begged for a piece of bread. A woman saw me and got frightened, then burst into tears. She brought me a piece of bread, and I thanked her.

I went to a peasant I knew, a bricklayer. I begged him to hide me in his barn. His wife asked if anyone had seen me, because the neighbors were evil and there were always Germans around. They hid me for a couple of days and then said that they feared for their lives and that I should leave quickly.

As I left, I met a peasant whom I knew. He had a scythe. I begged him to hide me. “I have nothing against that,” he said, “but I fear for my children.” I went to the woods. A hard rain began to fall, and I was soaked to the skin. “Master of the Universe,” I said, “why are you torturing me like this? I’m alone, my family is gone, I’m surrounded by enemies. How long will I have the strength to survive such troubles?” But a Jew should have no doubts about the Master of the Universe. So was it fated.

I went toward Radzivilov. When I arrived at Tamasznaya Station, a peasant woman said that not far away a Jew had made a cement bunker. “Maybe the Jew will allow you in.” I knew he would not, and I begged her to be kind and hide me somewhere. She led me to her barn, made a bed in the hay, and gave me a couple of pieces of bread.

It was cold. She had pity on me and came and said, “I you want, I’ll take you into the cellar. She showed herself to be a decent person. Her husband, Pasieka, came home and saw me. He was not opposed to my staying in their cellar.

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For 10 months I stayed hidden in that pit at the peasant Pasieka’s without seeing the sun. The whole time I ate only bread and potatoes, not motivated to eat nonkosher food. Occasionally Germans would come to the peasant. He would honor them with liquor and good food. The Germans would ask if he knew of anyone in the area who was harboring Jews. He would answer that he hated Jews and if he encountered one, he would kill him or hand him over to the Germans. The Germans praised him.

One time Pasieka came to me and said, “Yoske, if you want, I’ll take you to another place, to a barn with hay. I’m afraid that someone will notice you.” In the barn where Pasieka took me there were five Jews from Radzivilov (whose names I don’t remember), two women and three men.

After three days we were ordered to leave the barn. Where could we go now? I went and knocked on a door. It seems that this was the village magistrate’s home. His wife came out. She was shocked when she saw me. “What are you doing here?” she cried. “In the village

are two cars full of Germans. Go quickly around to the barn and hide in the buckwheat." I stayed there until dawn. She came in and said that in the village the police were seeking Jews, going from house to house looking for hidden Jews.

There were haystacks in the field. I hid there. Then the other Jews came. We met a peasant, a believing shoemaker, and he promised to help make a [unknown word] in the field. At night we would go out looking for food. Once the Germans came and destroyed the haystack. We were left homeless.

The Jews left and brought back a shovel, and dug a big trench in the middle of the field. There were six of us. The trench wasn't deep, because digging it had allowed water to seep in. In the trench we could neither stand nor lie down. We made a little entryway and covered it with earth.

We stayed in that trench for a little while. Sometimes a peasant would bring us some food.

Liberation

The was in summer 1944. As we were lying there, we suddenly heard someone coming to the trench and saying in Russian, "Who's there?" The covering was removed, and when we emerged, a couple of Russian soldiers were standing there. We thanked them profusely for freeing us. We went off to a peasant. A Russian soldier brought us food and clothing. The soldier said that his army unit was going to Dubno and would take us along.

In our group was Yakov Paritski (now in Brazil). A Jewish soldier from Bessarabia came and said that the Russian officers would help us with food and take us to Dubno.

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After Liberation

When we got to Dubno, we met Ite Gun's brother-in-law (her husband's brother). In Dubno we found an empty room in a Jewish home. With me, aside from Yakov Paritski, were some Radzivilovers.

In Dubno I went to the Soviet commander and told him what I had done before the Hitlerist occupation. I told him that it had been more than a year since I had washed my body with water. The commander ordered a bath to be heated up, and we invited several other Jews. We made up a minyan and built a sukkah.

I lived in Dubno until Simchat Torah. I went to Radzivilov and there I met Sheyndel Oks, Ite Gun,[2] and other Jews. We made a kitchen and cooked kosher meals.

I lived in Radzivilov until the repatriation to Poland.

[2] Testimonies by these survivors are published in *Radzivilov: Sefer zikaron,* edited by: Ya'acov Adini (Tel Aviv, 1966). An English translation is online at the JewishGen Yizkor Book Project (https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Radzivilov/Radzivilov.html).

In 1945, I went to Poland. I lived in Krakow. Then there was the pogrom in Kielce, and I quickly decided to leave Poland and go to the Land of Israel.

There were 13 of us Jews. We gave a Russian officer 1,000 zlotys, and he took us to the border.

We got to Budapest and from there went to Austria, staying in Linz for three years. There were many Jews there. Then we went to Italy, and from there, in 1949, I arrived in Israel.

In Israel I spent 4½ years in Mahane Yisrael. It was bad for me there. I went to work to earn money for food, even though I was old. In Mahane Yisrael I met Golde Graber, a single woman who had also lost her family. We got married, and she is here with me.

Mrs. Royzman

It was very hard for us in Mahane Yisrael. I had pity on the old man (Royzman), who was suffering and had, poor thing, to work. I asked that we be taken to the settlement for the elderly, and I was told that that could happen in four years. I sent a request to Ben Gurion, Ben Tzvi in Jerusalem, and Ben Gurion ordered us to be taken to the "Sha'ar Menashe" old people's home, where we have lived for 6½ years.

We were given a furnished apartment in B'nei Brak, and we received a pension of 52 pounds a month. We live on that. Yakov Paritski, with whom Royzman had been in hiding and who now lives in Brazil, occasionally sends us a little help.

I have related this so that the Radzivilov organization will know how their fellow citizen suffers. He is close to 90 and has survived such hard times, and they offer no help.

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He is alone, ill, and friendless, concluded Mrs. Royzman.

Recorded by Y. Alperovitsh, 10 September 1962, B'nei Brak