

# Shelly

The Germans invaded Soviet Poland in June 1941. In August, they came to Rovno, my city. After the initial roundup of Jewish families for the death camps, German soldiers began collecting Jews for slave labor camps. Then, in the winter of 1940-41, the Nazis herded the city's remaining Jews into the ghetto. My mother and I were in the ghetto for about three months. We were very closely watched in the ghetto. We were not even allowed to go outside. One time, I did go outside and a soldier pointed a gun at me, so I never went out again. We were there about three months and we heard rumors that there was going to be another roundup. Although I did not know exactly how it was arranged, we managed to escape to a small village about 12 kilometers from Rovno. My Aunt Sophie had arranged with a farmer to hide me, my mother, my cousin, and herself.

There were several reasons why the farmer agreed to take such a risk. His son was a resistance fighter in the Polish Underground. The son also had a special fondness for my aunt who had been kind to him when he was a young child. Most importantly, we paid the farmer and his wife for their trouble.

At first, we hid in a small space in the top of the farmer's barn. It was large enough only for us to sit or lie down. The farmer made a tunnel through which we were brought food. After about 18 months informers alerted the Nazis to our hiding place and we decided to make a run for it, taking off into the woods. We spent a sleepless night in the forest listening to the sounds of the Nazis searching for us.

The next day, another farmer came to our aid. He had known my mother back in the days when she ran the small grocery store in Rovno. He was also a friend of the first farmer who had helped us. The second farmer took us into the wheat fields near his home where we spent three days hiding until the Nazis got tired of searching. The next hiding place was under a trough where horses drank. We lay there for several weeks, but it was too horrible and we couldn't take it. My mother said she would rather die than continue living there.

Next we moved to an underground tunnel where the farmer stored his grain. That was where we lived for three months. It was pretty bad because there was one hole that the farmer dug for air and in order to get the food we would have to crawl on our bellies through a tunnel. Our living conditions were damp, dark, and frightening. Just candles and lots of rats.

[In February 1944, when the Russians took control of Rovno, Shelly and her family came out of their hiding place. For almost two years they did not know what had happened to Shelly's father. Then in late 1945 they discovered that Shelly's father had also survived the war. The family was reunited. Together, they sneaked across the Polish-German border to the section of Germany occupied by the United States. After three years in a displaced persons camp, they emigrated to the United States. They have lived in North Carolina since 1972.]

1. Where were Shelly and her family living when the Nazis took Poland? Where were they taken by the Nazis? What happened to the other groups of people who were taken by the Nazis?
2. What happened when Shelly went outside the ghetto? What do you think might have been worst part of her experience in the ghetto?
3. Who helped Shelly and her mother escape from the ghetto? What reasons did he have for helping them?
4. Where was Shelly's first hiding place? Why did they leave that hiding place?
5. Who helped them next? Why do you think he helped them?
6. Where was the second hiding place? Describe conditions in this hiding place. How did Shelly's mother feel about staying here?
7. Where was their last hiding place? What do you think would be the hardest part of staying in this hiding place?