

GHETTO ■ ANATOLY IN THE ZHMERINKA GHETTO

Anatoly Kizhnerman was born in 1935 in the Soviet Union and moved as a young child with his family to Zhmerinka in the Ukraine, a Soviet territory at the time. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the family found themselves in the midst of war.

As you know, the war between Germany and Russia started on June 22, 1941. In a couple of days the Germans were in the same city where I was living. Of course, most people didn't have time to leave the city.

You know, the Ukraine was invaded many times by Germany before the Bolshevik Revolution [Communist Revolution, 1917], and Jewish people, who often had suffered at the hands of the Russian military, had the opinion that German soldiers were very nice to Jews. You have to remember, the Ukraine was one of the most nationalistic and anti-Semitic republics in the U.S.S.R. [Soviet Union], and Jews suffered a lot from the Ukrainian people, too.



Jewish men arrested in Odessa, near Zhmerinka, Ukraine, after the German occupation, 1941

The Germans divided the city into two parts. Under the agreement between Germany and Romania, which was a satellite of Germany, part of the Ukraine had to belong to Romania. All the Jews living in the Romanian part were put into a ghetto. In the other part of the city, all Jews were killed.

I remember everything. Because when you're at this age—I was about five years old—and you see terrible things, when people can kill each other for a piece of bread because they don't have more to eat, when parents see how their children are dying because they don't have enough to eat. It's very deep in your memory. And you saw everything. And a child's memory keeps very well. Every human being—anyone, animals—when you see something which is dangerous, you will try to protect yourself. You saw how people were killed. You saw how the German soldiers looked, how they killed people. And, of course, you develop an attitude by which you protect yourself. And, as a child, you do the same. When you see a soldier, you would try to escape.

When they put us into the ghetto, they used adults for labor to work on their roads, to fix the bridges which were destroyed during the invasion, and which were destroyed by the Soviet army when they left.

It was not legal, but you would exchange your clothes for a meal, for food. And that was the only way to try and survive. Our house [in the ghetto], a three-bedroom house, was crowded—it was only a place to sleep—but it had a big garden and we had a lot of vegetables, and this gave us

I remember everything. Because when you're at this age—I was about five—and you see terrible things, when people can kill each other for a piece of bread because they don't have more to eat, when parents see how their children are dying . . . It's very deep in your memory.

the opportunity to survive. We ate potatoes, I remember. It's all we got. Again, I say, if you put a person in this situation, his only thought is to survive.

I don't know how they found out, but somebody, the non-Jewish people, told the Jews that the Germans were starting to prepare to kill the Jews. This day when somebody gave a message of orders to kill the Jews on that night, everybody left the ghetto. And every family around the ghetto, they started to save the Jews. I remember when we started to run, somebody started to shoot at us. I told my mom, "Don't worry. Run. Faster. Faster."

Anatoly's mother found a family who hid them until the Soviets liberated the region in March 1944. He completed college in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Russia, and married fellow survivor Rachel Giralnik in 1957. In 1980 they came to the United States with their son and a year later settled in Greensboro, North Carolina.

[See Rachel Kizhnerman's narrative in Ch. 6, Rescuers.]

ONLINE RESOURCES

- *Witnesses to the Horror: North Carolinians Remember the Holocaust*, by Cecile Holmes White in cooperation with the North Carolina Council on the Holocaust, 1987
archive.org/details/witnessestohorro00whit
- Invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany, June 1941 (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)
encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/invasion-of-the-soviet-union-june-1941
- The Invasion of the Soviet Union and the Beginnings of Mass Murder (Yad Vashem)
www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/final-solution-beginning/mass-murder-in-ussr.html



Anatoly with his son Jerry in the Soviet Union, 1963



Rachel and Anatoly Kizhnerman in Rome shortly before their arrival in the U.S. with their son, 1979