

EVA GALLER: STUDY GUIDE

BACKGROUND

Eva (Szeva) was born on January 1, 1923, in the town of Oleszyce (Oh-la-shit-za) in southeastern Poland. Until the end of World War I, her region of Galicia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. When that region became Polish after World War I, the Jews retained a sentimental attachment to former times under Kaiser Franz Josef, who was viewed as 'a friend.' Jews owned most of the stores on the market square. Poles and Ukrainians were farmers. The Orthodox Jewish cemetery in Oleszyce was established before 1767. The town was renowned in the Jewish world for religious 'articles' (including torahs and prayer shawls) that were produced there. Eva's father Israel Vogel was a (relatively) prosperous businessman (exporting Jewish 'articles') and a leader of Oleszyce's Jewish community. Eva's mother Ita was from nearby Jozefow. The family was Orthodox. Eva was oldest of eight: Hana was fourteen in 1939; Pincus thirteen; Berko twelve; Molly ten; Dora eight; Gezel six; and Ariel one. In addition, Eva had six step-siblings: Isaac, Sala, Rebecca, Leo, Marcus, and Moses. Leo lived in New York City, where he sold his father's products. Moses, with his bride, left for the United States immediately prior to the outbreak of war.

KEY TEACHING POINT: Oleszyce was a town of 3,571 people,

including 811 Poles, 862 Ukrainians, 1,896 Jews, and two Austrian families.

There was a Catholic Church, a Greek Orthodox Church, and three synagogues (two small, one big). The different ethnic groups lived side by side one another but usually at a 'distance.' Yet friendships among Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians existed despite the differences. Families in this small town had known each other for many generations. Everybody went to school together, but Jews always sat apart (on left side of classroom). Poles held the political offices and governed the town. The Jews and Ukrainians were mostly excluded from politics. In the documentary, Eva says that it "was a quiet life. We didn't know anything better, and we didn't have any complaints. Everybody lived their own life."

WORLD WAR II

Hitler and Stalin, though arch-enemies, signed a 'non-aggression' pact in August 1939, the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (named after the Soviet and Nazi foreign ministers). Hitler's purpose was to dissuade England and France from honoring their treaty obligations to Poland. In a secret protocol, Hitler and Stalin agreed to divide Central and Eastern Europe between themselves. Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Two days later, England and France declared war on Nazi Germany. The German Army occupied Oleszyce on September 12th. Ukrainians wildly greeted them. The Gestapo, as everywhere, quickly executed members of the Polish leadership as well as the 'richest' Jews.

KEY TEACHING POINT: In accordance with the Molotov-

Ribbentrop Pact, the Red Army invaded eastern Poland on September 17, 1939, and quickly occupied half of the country. Oleszyce was located on the newly formed Nazi-Soviet border, which was formally established on September 28, 1939.

After fifteen days of terror, the Germans withdrew from Oleszyce to the demarcation line that had been drawn a few kilometers to the west and north. On September 27th, the town was occupied by the Red Army, which was greeted by many Jews who obviously preferred the Soviets to the Nazis. This reception reinforced the deeply rooted stereotype that Jews and communism were one. The NKVD created a militia of Jews and Ukrainians and a network of spies (which included Poles). The Ukrainians preferred the Germans, thinking that Hitler would give them an independent homeland. The Poles hated the Germans *and* the Russians.

SOVIET DEPORTATIONS 1940-'41

The Soviets, with local collaborators, imposed a brutal regime on the newly annexed territories and deported the leadership class and its families to the waste-lands of Siberia. Stalin wanted to remove the leaders and demoralize the population, breaking its will to resist the 'new order.' He used this same policy against the Russian people. In 1940-'41, one and a half million people were 'arrested' by the NKVD (Soviet secret police) and deported from Soviet occupied territories. In Oleszyce, the NKVD struck in February, April, and May 1940. Many Polish families and two Jewish families were awoken in the middle of the night and deported.

See: Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western

JUNE 22, 1941

Soviet rule in Oleszyce lasted almost two years (1939-'41). On June 22, 1941, the German Army invaded the Soviet Union. Oleszyce was occupied by the Germans that first morning, a Sunday. They quickly established a Ukrainian police force, which wore a blue and yellow armband and attacked Jews and Poles.

PUBLIC HUMILIATION of JEWS

As Eva tells us in the documentary, the Nazis and their Ukrainian collaborators humiliated the Jews in the market square, while the community's three synagogues were burned – the large synagogue was later dynamited. According to Eva, her Polish and Ukrainian neighbors watched and delighted in the Jewish suffering. The Nazis ripped off the beards of Jewish men and engaged in other sadistic 'sport.' The Jews were robbed on the street and in their homes. They were put to work cleaning the streets.

KEY TEACHING POINT: The Nazis invariably humiliated and terrorized Jews in public spectacles and destroyed the synagogues with the gaiety of a circus. This was an effort to demoralize the Jews, and to inform local people that it didn't matter what happened to the Jews. They were 'sub-human,' and everybody could take advantage of them. The public humiliation of the Jews

further brutalized the perpetrators *and* the bystanders.

The Nazis established a *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) and quickly began extracting bribes. A group of Jewish policemen was organized – and used as an instrument of German rule. They wore caps with a ‘star of David’ and carried batons. The Jews were robbed, starved, murdered, and forced to wear a white armband with a ‘star of David.’ They weren’t permitted to walk on the (wooden) sidewalks. Men and boys were taken to build roads and treated inhumanely. The poorest people couldn’t to bribe their way out.

‘OPERATION REINHARD’

The mass murder of the Polish Jews, called ‘Operation Reinhard’ by the Nazis, began in March 1942. The Belzec death camp was located near Oleszyce – only three train stations away. Arriving at Belzec, Jews were beaten, robbed of their last belongings (including their hair), and sent to ‘showers,’ where they were gassed by carbon monoxide. Except for five-hundred Jewish men who were enslaved and forced to ‘work’ at Belzec, the victims were murdered within a few hours of arriving.

KEY TEACHING POINT: The Nazis and their collaborators were murderers *and* thieves. Theirs was mass murder based on racist ideology *and* human greed.

The Nazis profited off mass murder. They counted, weighed, and bundled the possessions (including wedding rings) of the murdered people. These ‘goods’ were packed off to Germany. Money, jewelry, and

gold were deposited in a Berlin bank. After the war, many Nazi killers lived off this 'loot' once they had obtained false 'documents,' assumed new identities, and immigrated to South America and elsewhere. The Nazi *collaborators* also profited. They received Jewish property. And *Ordinary* people profited: they moved into Jewish homes and/or took over Jewish stores. Greed walked hand in hand with murder. No wonder that surviving Jews weren't welcomed home after the war.

See: Belzec, Sobobor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps, by Vitzhak Arad; Belzec, by Rudolf Reder; Odilio Globocnik, Hitler's Man in the East, by Joseph Poprzeczny.

LUBACZOW GHETTO

On October 14, 1942, the Jews of Oleszyce (and Jews of nearby communities) were ordered to the ghetto in Lubaczow [Lou-batt-choff], a large town seven kilometers from Oleszyce.

KEY TEACHING POINT: The Nazi killers concentrated the Jewish people in one locale, moving them a step closer to Belzec.

The Jews were allowed only a few minutes to pack and left Oleszyce with few belongings. Neighbors descended on Jewish homes and fought one another over the possessions. The Catholic curate Jozef Mroczkowski witnessed the expulsion of the Jews. He wrote in his diary: "It made an unpleasant impression – but thus far no one pities them, indeed – the atmosphere has been cleansed, there is more space in town; general

‘contentment.’”

In the Lubaczow ghetto, Eva’s family and relatives, twenty-seven in all, lived in one room. Disease and starvation raged, and people died everyday. The curate Mroczkowski, a member of the Polish underground resistance movement called the Home Army (AK), smuggled himself into the ghetto and delivered grain to Jewish young man named Szulim Szwarz, who was from Oleszyce.

See: The War in Oleszyce, by Reverend Jozef Mroczkowski (in Polish). This diary was published in the Polish magazine Karta 24 in 1998.

BELZEC DEATH CAMP

Cattle cars packed with Jewish people were sent to Belzec during most of 1942. The railroad traffic was continuous, but few Jews (initially) knew what was happening. They were totally cut off from the outside world. In the documentary, Eva relates the story of a Jewish man who (with the help of a German “angel”) escaped from Belzec and slipped into the Lubaczow ghetto. He told the Jewish community that Belzec was not a work camp (as rumored) but an extermination camp.

KEY TEACHING POINT: This man was one of few people who escaped from Belzec. Because of his information, the Jews in the Lubaczow ghetto *knew* that Belzec meant death. As a result, many people jumped from the ‘death trains,’ knowing what awaited them.

On January 8, 1943, “a bright cold day,” SS and Ukrainian police, with the ‘help’ of the Jewish police, ordered the Jews from the ghetto

buildings. The Germans and their helpers ordered the Jews to the train station (a few blocks away). The murderers ran wild. Jews fled and were machine-gunned in the streets. Fifteen hundred were marched to the Jewish cemetery and shot. Five hundred were taken to a forest and shot. Two thousand bodies were taken from the cemetery. For several days, “rows of corpse-filled sleighs” headed to a nearby forest where the corpses were dumped in an anti-tank ditch. One hundred and six Gypsies (Roma) and several Jews were shot in another forest.

Eugeniusz Szajnowski, a sympathetic Pole in Lubaczow, witnessed the ‘liquidation’ of the ghetto: “This sort of manhunt (killing those who escaped or showed resistance) took all of Friday. It was much the same the following day, Jewish corpses were lying everywhere. The vileness of some people from members of the local population knew no limits. There are also those who, greedily eyeing the possessions abandoned by the Jews, direct the ‘hunters’ to Jewish hideaways.” The “German actions with regards to the Jews aroused enormous pity and sorrow in the Polish community,” he wrote.

During the Nazi ‘action,’ Eva’s family hid behind a ‘double wall’ in the room. They were discovered. Four thousand Jews were packed into cattle cars. After the ‘journey’ began, Eva and her siblings Hana and Pinkus (with many others) squeezed through a tiny window and fell to the ground. The guards on top of the train shot and killed Hana and Pinkus (and many others). Eva fell into a ditch filled with snow and survived. The railroad track was lined with the dead bodies of those who tried to escape.

KEY TEACHING POINT: Those who built ‘double walls’ and those who jumped from the ‘death trains,’ represent a special form of resistance to the Nazis.

Eugeniusz Szajnowski's brother-in-law Marian Kocielski and wife Rozalia hid the young Jewish man Szulim Szwarc from Oleszyce. The Ukrainians expelled the Poles in the spring of 1944, as the German Army retreated from Russia. Szwarc was forced to leave his shelter and was betrayed by "non-Poles" in May 1944. He was shot by the Germans in the Jewish cemetery in Oleszyce. In 1993, Yad Vashem honored the Kocielskis as 'Righteous Gentiles.'

See: Keep on Yelling, by Maurie Hoffman, a survivor from Lubaczow. He witnessed the Nazi 'action' in January 1943 and fled to the forests. He ultimately joined a Jewish partisan group led by Mundek Lukawiezki, which operated in the forests near Lubaczow; and Only The Land Remained the Same: Lubaczow 1942-1943 (in Polish), by Eugeniusz Szajnowski. Rocznik Lubaczowski 9/10 (2000).

EVA RETURNS to OLESZYCE

Eva removed her Star of David armband and walked through the forest to Oleszyce. She was sheltered by two different women (non-Jews). The first woman hid Eva behind a closet for several hours. The second woman discovered Eva sleeping beside a calf in the barn, trying to stay warm. She took Eva in for the night but had her leave before daybreak. The woman was afraid that her neighbors might notice that she was helping a Jew and report her to the Nazis or their Ukrainian helpers. The deportations occurred on January 8 and 9th. The massacre continued until January 15th. The Polish curate Mroczkowski wrote, "A host of Jews also hid in Oleszyce, and several or more were discovered every day."

KEY TEACHING POINT: In Poland, the Nazi penalty for helping Jews was death.

'Passing' as a Catholic girl (but with none of the mandatory identification 'documents' or 'papers'), Eva took a passenger train to Cracow, hiding in the bathroom from the conductor. She slept several nights in the Cracow train station. Each day she ventured into the city searching for food and fellow Jews. On the third day, she was arrested by the Germans in a street 'round-up.' They were grabbing Polish people for labor in Germany. Eva pretended to be Polish (she looked Polish and didn't have a 'Jewish accent'). She was given German 'documents' and sent as a Polish 'forced laborer' to a German farm on the Czech-Austrian border (Sudetenland). Nearby towns were Kirschfeld and Joslowitz. Eva befriended the Polish girls (other 'forced laborers') but told no one that she was Jewish.

KEY TEACHING POINT: Because of manpower shortages on the home front, the Nazis tried to 'recruit' Poles (and other foreigners) to work in Germany but resorted to seizing people off the street. It was often safer in Germany for a 'passing' Jewish woman than in Poland, where people recognized Jews more readily. Unlike Polish men, Jewish men were circumcised and thus easily identified. They had less chance of 'passing' as Gentiles.

Eva's childhood friend Annie Wertman jumped from the 'death' train and was helped by several people in Oleszyce, including seventeen year old Witold Maczak. He transported Annie in a wagon (hidden beneath hay) to Jaroslav, thirty-two kilometers away. With the help of Polish underground resistance (AK) members Zbigniew and Tadeusz Gargaz, as well as a man named Grzeda, Annie received the 'documents' of a Polish girl who had been conscripted for labor in Germany but

refused to go. While on the train near Cracow, Annie was betrayed by a former schoolmate. Polish police beat her and handed her over to the Germans, who sent her to the Plaszow camp outside Cracow and then to Auschwitz-Birkenau. She was liberated by the Red Army in Czechoslovakia.

In 1997, as a result of Annie's efforts, Witold Maczak was honored as a 'Righteous Gentile' by Yad Vashem. He estimates that his group, which included the Jewish policeman Herschel Reich, nicknamed 'Puzik,' helped twenty Jewish girls escape from Poland ('passing' as Poles) to Germany. He doesn't know how many survived. 'Puzik' was betrayed a few months before the end of the war. When the Germans and Ukrainian police tried to take him prisoner, he pulled out a razor blade and slit his throat.

'JUDEN-FREI'

'SS and Police Leader' Katzmann declared that Galicia was *Judenfrei* ('free of Jews') on June 30, 1943. "Owing to the phrase 'Galician Jew,'" he wrote at the time, "Galicia was probably the small corner on earth most widely known and most frequently mentioned in connection with the Jews." He acknowledged that "individual Jews" in the countryside were still "occasionally picked up by the Order Police or the Gendarmerie" and "sent for special treatment." According to the Nazis, 610,000 Jewish people were murdered during 'Operation Reinhard.' The Jewish 'civilization' in Poland was engulfed, uprooted, and exterminated, all within a period of sixteen months.

POST-WAR

Eva spent over two years as a ‘forced laborer’ at a farm on the Czech-Austrian border. She was liberated by the Red Army in April 1945 and returned to Poland (but not to Oleszyce). She settled in Wroclaw (formerly Breslau) with other survivors. Her friend Annie Wertman planned to marry David Bleiberg, also from Oleszyce.

Henry Galler was Eva’s pre-war sweetheart from Oleszyce. He had been arrested by the Soviets in 1941 after he left a work detail to return home for *Passover*. He was sentenced to three years in Soviet prison (the ‘gulag’). He languished for almost two years. After the Germans attacked Russia in June 1941, Henry was released from captivity and joined the *Kosciuszko Division* of the Polish Army that was formed in Russia. He became a lieutenant in heavy artillery – and never told anybody that he was Jewish. After the war, in April 1946, Henry ran into David Bleiberg in the Cracow train station. David invited Henry to his wedding a few days later in Wroclaw. There, after five years, Henry was reunited with Eva.

KEY TEACHING POINT: Henry was removed from the (future) setting of the Holocaust when he was arrested by the Soviets and sent to the ‘gulag.’ In turn, he was rescued from the ‘gulag’ when the Nazis invaded Russia and he was released to join the Polish Army. He survived both Hitler and Stalin, and was ‘saved’ by both.

Henry lost his entire family in the Holocaust. He was eldest of eight. He was eighteen in 1939; his brother Israel was sixteen; Moses fourteen; Hana twelve; Pesa ten; Celia seven; Abraham three; a seventh sibling was born after Henry’s imprisonment.

In July 1946, Eva flew from Poland to Sweden (Henry brought her to the Warsaw airport). In November 1946, Henry smuggled himself out of Poland on a Swedish coal boat; he bribed his way on board with a \$100 bill that he obtained on the black market. Eva and Henry were married in Sweden on December 24, 1946. They had no possessions, and Eva had to borrow a coat for the ceremony. They didn't know anybody and asked two people off the street to be their witnesses. In 1954, Eva and Henry, with their first daughter, moved to Brooklyn, New York. Henry was a tailor and worked several jobs. In 1961, the family (three daughters) moved to New Orleans. Henry eventually opened his own business, 'Mr. Henry Custom Tailor.' Eva taught Hebrew to Jewish children. She fulfilled her great wish of returning to school and received a history degree from the University of New Orleans in 1985.

Eva and Henry lost their home to Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. Eva died on January 5, 2006. She is buried in Dallas, Texas, exiled from her first homeland, and her second.

EVA GALLER: GLOSSARY

NAME _____

Define the following glossary terms and explain their relevance to Eva's story:

1. Galicia –

2. Greek Orthodox –

3. Synagogue –

4. Torah –

5. Red Army –

6. NKVD –

7. Passover –

8. Collaborators –

9. SS –

10. Star of David armband –

11. Ghetto –

12. 'Double wall' –

13. Belzec –

14. 'Forced laborer' –

15. *Judenfrei* –

16. Zlotys –

17. 'Documents' or 'Papers' –

18. Sudetenland –

19. Henry Galler –

20. Annie Bleiberg –

21. Stanislaw Wyspianski –

22. Home Army –

EVA GALLER: KEY QUESTIONS

NAME _____

Answer the following questions using information and quotes from the documentary and study guide:

1. Describe Eva's life in Oleszyce before World War II, including a description of her family. What was the relationship among Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians?

2. In what ways did the Nazis humiliate the Jews of Oleszyce? Why did they do this? Describe what Eva saw, and how she felt.

3. Why were the Jews of Oleszyce ordered to the Lubaczow ghetto? Describe their expulsion from Oleszyce, and Eva's experience in the Nazi ghetto at Lubaczow.

4. Eva describes a Jewish man who escaped from the Belzec death camp. According to Eva, how did he escape? How did his information influence the Jews in the Lubaczow ghetto?

5. Describe the deportation of the Jews from the Lubaczow ghetto, including an account of Eva's jump from the train. How did she survive that jump?

6. What happened when Eva returned to Oleszyce? Describe the actions of non-Jews who helped her. What were the 'obstacles' to Christian rescue of Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland?

7. What happened to Eva after spending the night with the non-Jewish family in Oleszyce?

8. How did Eva reunite with Henry Galler after the war? Describe their lives together.

9. What is Eva's message to young people?