

RACHEL HUBER

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Rachel Huber (born Renée Herscher), daughter of Gustav and Bertha Herscher, was born on November 16, 1925, in Cernauti, Romania (now

Chernivtsi, Ukraine). Rachel was an only child and grew up in a traditional Jewish home. Rachel spoke German at home and Romanian at school. Her school had Jewish and non-Jewish students; due to antisemitism, Rachel only had Jewish friends. Cernauti had a large Jewish population, a Jewish theater, a Hebrew school, and many Jewish and Zionist organizations. While Rachel grew up in a strong Jewish community, she and its members faced antisemitism from Romanian authorities and the fascist Iron Guard.

In the summer and fall of 1940, Romania lost about 30 percent of its population and territory. Bessarabia and northern Bukovina were given to the Soviet Union; northern Transylvania was ceded to Hungary; Dobruja was ceded to Bulgaria. Cernauti, where Rachel lived, became part of the Soviet Union. Romania joined the Axis powers in November 1940. Restrictive measures against Jewish Romanians were put into place, Jews were robbed and assaulted, and Jewish businesses were seized. Romania participated in the German-led invasion of the Soviet Union, and in the summer of 1941, the country was given the territory between the Dneister and Bug Rivers. This area became known as “Transnistria.” Romanian authorities established ghettos and concentration camps in this area.

The house that Rachel grew up in became part of the Cernauti ghetto. Rachel’s family members who lived outside the ghetto area moved in with her family; the house was overcrowded with people. Rachel and her parents remained in the ghetto until the summer of 1942. After Rachel and her family were almost

deported from the ghetto, she begged her father to figure out a way for them to escape and survive. Her father had a friend who managed a movie theatre in Cernauti. Rachel’s father spoke to his friend—who was also Jewish—and convinced him to let the family hide in a small room at the movie theatre. They remained hidden at the movie theatre for over a year.

In the winter of 1944, Rachel and her family were told that the Romanians and Germans were retreating. They left the theatre and went back to their home. In March of that year, the Soviets officially liberated Cernauti. The family decided that they did not want to live under Soviet rule, and in August 1945, they traveled by train to Poland. During this trip, Rachel heard about the pogrom in Kielce. The family wound up at a displaced persons’ camp in Germany, and they remained there until 1948. While there, Rachel met her future husband, Shmuel Huber. Rachel and her family tried to illegally immigrate to British Mandate Palestine, and were passengers on the ship, Exodus. The family, along with the other passengers of the ship, were not allowed in. The ship was sent back to Europe, and Rachel and her family were sent to a displaced persons’ camp at Bergen-Belsen.

Rachel, Shmuel and her parents immigrated to Israel in 1949, and lived there until 1957, when they immigrated to Australia. Rachel and Shmuel have two children and three grandchildren. This interview was conducted on May 28, 1996, in Sydney, Australia.