

Golden Valley couple fell in love while guerrillas against Nazis

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By Eric Black

Jack and Rochelle Sutin were teenagers when the Nazis occupied their neighboring Polish hometowns of Mir and Stolpce in 1941.

The Nazis killed 17 members of their two families in one day, but 17-year-old Jack and 16-year-old Rochelle escaped to the woods. They spent the next two years as partisans, ambushing German troops, blowing up bridges, staying alive and falling in love. They have co-written a book about their experiences, titled "Jack and Rochelle: A Holocaust Story of Love and Resistance."

Rochelle, 76, recalls the time -- after they hadn't eaten for four days -- that they found a dead horse, scraped off a layer of maggots and dug deep into the animal to find some meat they hoped wouldn't poison them. "I tell you," she said from Golden Valley this week, "you couldn't take me to a restaurant now where the food would taste as good as that horse tasted to me then."

They were unaware until after the war of what most of us think of as the Holocaust -- the concentration camps and the gas chambers. When they found out, they were glad they were part of a group of guerrilla warriors.

Rochelle said she has become more pessimistic with the years and fears that another Holocaust could happen. "We're not even dead and already some people are trying to deny that it ever happened," she said. "How much easier it will be when the last of us old dinosaurs is gone and there's no one who can say: 'Of course it happened. I was there.'"

Like the other survivors on this page, the Sutins gave videotaped interviews to a crew working with filmmaker Steven Spielberg, who has created a videotape library so the record will live on when the survivors are gone.

Rochelle said it is difficult to reconcile the Holocaust with the existence of a just God. But Jack, 77, said he believes in miracles, such as his two children, his three grandchildren and the dream he had while in the forest in which his dead mother foretold his life with Rochelle.

Later this year the Sutins will celebrate their 60th anniversary.

-- Eric Black