United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Maria Pawulska Rasiej
May 8, 2013
RG-50.030*0700

PREFACE

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MARIA PAWULSKA RASIEJ
May 8, 2013

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **Maria Pawulska Rasiej**, is that correct? On May 8th, 2013, in **Teaneck**, **New Jersey**. Thank you very mus – much Mrs. **Rasiej** for agreeing to speak with us today. And at the very beginning, I want to make sure that the pronunciation of your maiden, as well as your married name will be correct, so could you tell me how to truly say these – these names?

Answer: **Maria Pawulska Rasiej**.

Q: **Rasiej**. **Rasiej**. And what was your maiden name?

A: **Pawulska**.

Q: Ah, **Pawulska**. Okay, can you tell me where you were born, and when you were born?

A: I was born in **Lvov**, **Poland**, and I was born on the December 8th, 1926.

Q: Okay. Can you – what were your parents' names?

A: My mother was **Maria** also, or **Maria**, and my father's name was **Stanisław Pawulski**.

Q: **Pawulski**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And did you have brothers and sisters?

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A: I have two brothers. One is **Tadeusz**, and the other one is **Jerzy**(ph).

Q: Are they older or younger than you?

A: Younger.

Q: Okay, so you were the oldest in the family?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Tell me a little bit about your parents. How did your father support the family? What was his profession or business?

A: He was the al – an – officer in the Polish army.

Q: Okay.

A: He – for most of the – of his life.

Q: He was a career military man.

A: Career. He started in the first World War was **[indecipherable]**, the first, before **Poland** became independent in 1914, til he was taken prisoner by Soviets in 1939.

Q: Okay. We're – when you were growing up, if he was an active army officer, what were some of his duties? Ho – what did he do during peacetime?

A: He usually spend the time with his battalion, or group of sol-soldiers, or going af – for example, maneuvers, or also introducing to the teenagers or hi – teenagers, or young people as high school, into a kind of preparation for a military high school, or military preparation, as in the case of emergencies. And he was usually out of the

house for most of the hours that usually people in – who are working were, usually from about eight o'clock until four o'clock at – in the afternoon. And then he had sometimes meetings with – at his place at the quarters where his army post was. And sometimes soci – social events, sometimes in the parades. I think he had – at one point was the adjutant of the general who was chief officer of **Lvov**. So as an adjutant he would stand at the place where the parade was being received by the president of the city. And – that I remember even –

Q: Yeah.

A: – as a small child, I was so very proud of him standing there. He had special – at that time he had a special kind of uniform of **[indecipherable]** which mean the soldiers of **[indecipherable]** in **Poland**, which had similar hat like the **[indecipherable]** mountaineers. And had the – by the hat, they had the eagle –

Q: On the side.

A: – on the – the eagle feathers.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Feathers.

Q: Ah, either fe –

A: An-And instead of the coat, it was a **peleryna**, which is the –

Q: A cape?

A: A cape.

Q: I see.

A: So that he was unique in that sense.

Q: What was his rank?

A: He was a captain.

Q: He was a captain. And was there an army base, a military base then, in **Lvov**?

A: Oh, but several. Italians, or several, how you call it, the – the bi – it's a big – was a very big city, so it had a lot of different kinds of **[indecipherable]** my father was with the – how you call the – the unit, the marching people, the soldiers, foot soldiers.

Q: Infantry?

A: Infantry.

Q: Okay.

A: And there – there was a cavalry and there was the heavy armored –

Q: Artillery.

A: – ra – artillery, light artillery, and also the air force. They had the small – there was an airport for – for the army, so – for the air officers in **Lvov**, called **[indecipherable]**. And sometimes he was, as a matter of fact, toward the end of his

career, he was in charge of security of being in adven – infantry, taking security of this Polish air for – at **Lvov** –

Q: The airport.

A: – air force – air – airport.

Q: Wa – it sounds like it was very much then a military town. Were all Polish cities had so many bases from the military, or was **Lvov** exceptional in some way?

A: No, **Lvov** was a third size city in **Poland**. It was a very well known, years, years before, centuries before, as a commercial crossroad from the **Baltic** to **Black Sea**.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so there was a lot of influx of the Armenians, and the people from the east who were trading, going through. And then later on it developed quite a well-known cultural center. And it was – it had this specific atmosphere. **Lvov** was somehow unique in that sense that if you meet anywhere somebody from **Lvov**, you always have something to talk about and you ask each other, where did you live, what street? And was a very patriotic city, but toward the end of the first World War, after the Austrian empire fell through – lost the war, **Galicia**, that was part of the Austrian empire was again, somehow, having problems with the minorities, and there was a big minority of the Ukrainians, wanted to have **Lvov** as their city, and there were strong battle in – for several months in the – with the arm – Prussian

army. At that time a – **Russia** entered already the war, already, after the revolutions, it was communist –

Q: Right.

A: – army that wanted to take over. At that time also was the battle for – they entered also the eastern border of **Poland** and wanted supposedly, as **Lenin** said, they wanted to bring communism to **Germany**. And so, in that battle, most of the young people who were fighting for the independence were already at the front, being busy, so the students of **Lvov**, the students of universities – there were a couple of polytechnic and university very well recognized. And the young children, like Boy Scouts, and – and were helping out and it retained its independence from the Ukrainians. It became part afterwards –

Q: Of **Poland**.

A: – it became part of Polish, because **[indecipherable]** I can't re-recall how many miles yet to the Russian border, because it, you know, was several hundreds of miles to the Russian border, so it was still well in – well in **Poland**.

Q: But it was close to the Ukrainian border.

A: Well, not – at that time, Ukrainian border, there were couple of hundred miles.

Q: Oh, still a few hundred miles.

A: Right, because **Russia** –

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Q: Was part – it was –

A: **Ukraine** was part of –

Q: – it was part of of **Russia**, yeah.

A: – **Russia** at that time.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: At that time **Ukraine** was still – when the communists came, they made **Ukraine** –

Q: Communist.

A: – park – part of **Russia**, communistic part of Soviet –

Q: I just was – I had thought it was so close to the border. I didn't realize there was still several hundred miles distance.

A: Mm-hm, right. I would say 200 - 300 miles.

Q: Yeah. Tell me a little bit about your mother. Her name again was?

A: **Maria**.

Q: **Maria**. And how – what was her role? Was she – does she also have a – a – an occupation, or was her occupation taking care of the children?

A: Before she got married, she was a teacher.

Q: Okay.

A: Or also she worked in bank. And then when she got married, one of the things that life of the officer was very often on the move. You spend few years here, few years there, and then we were born, so she really took care of us for rest of her life.

Q: Was – was your family from **Lvov** for generations, or had your parents moved there from other parts of **Poland**?

A: On my mother's side and my husband – my father's side, there were members of **Lvov** community. I don't know exactly, looking past a hundred years – more than hundred years of my father's families – progeny, and the relatives who were, but I know that they were quite well-known in the 19th century. And on my mother's side, they were well-recognized as book editors and booksellers. That was on my mother's side, and also when the oil started at the lower part of **Poland**, close to Ukrainian border, some of the – the members of my mother's family were owners of the – of the –

Q: Oil wells?

A: – oil wells, or participated in some kind of things.

Q: In the oil business probably. How would you describe your chi – the home life inside your home? Were your parents very strict, were they lenient? What were some of their values? What are the things you remember them, I guess sh-sharing with you that were important to them?

A: I think that I'm – I gained much from – from them, from the teaching, or wi – they were very moral people.

Q: Were they religious?

A: They were religious and they attended the church as we – although, when I started going to the – the primary school, it was a public school, but they were also – sometime the – the schools run by nuns, or the – for the girls, or for boys, the monks. But I was in public school, but we had also gone through a – learning religion in school, and attended all – part of our life was living also a religious life. And all our morals are based on that, and I think that – that added to the strength afterwards, that we, when difficulties started later in life, and the tragedy started, that the – the base was that we had loving parents, and my mother would – although I always felt that she preferred my brothers to me, she was very strict – stricter with me. It's only when I was grown-up, much grown-up, she – she told me that she expected more from me, and was stricter with me because the women have harder life, and have much more to depend on the moral self-awareness than the boys. So there – therefore, difference that I felt as a negative thing, was in the form of trying to make me stronger.

Q: Do you think it worked?

A: I think so.

Q: Yeah. Which – which parent were you closer to?

A: I was close to my mother because she was always around. But I was also – I knew that I was in – in ma – in the eyes of my father a little princess. I would – wouldn't do anything – even he expected also a lot of me. Fortunately I was a good student, so there was never this – any conflicts like that. But I remember once she wa – he was passing by my – our bedroom, and a rug that was near my bed was crooked. And I remember him telling me, you, with your artistic inclination, how can you stand a crooked rug? And tha – you know, that must have been so many years ago, but something like this happened. And I was very proud of my father, he had been – ha-had many friends, and was considered quite an – outstanding as a person.

Q: Was he an outgoing person?

A: I would say he was more like home person, whenever he was coming. He was not too much into going out so much, but usually when he would come home, I would remember him reading newspapers, and staying home, and – and also going visiting with the re – other relatives. But he was also very much feeling responsible for his subordinates. So he was always on the lookout, or checking out with them. So I understand they had a great admiration for him, which proved later on in life, when they were looking for him.

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Q: Would you describe your childhood? How would you describe your childhood? How would you, when you think back on those years before the war, what is the feeling that you have?

A: I would say, on – like most other girls, I would say similar experiences in school. I was sometimes teacher's pet, so I suffered a little bit sometimes, because being somehow shown as a – an example, makes you an enemy of some people. But anyway, mostly a good, pleasant type of fa-family, my mother and father, and also the distant family, aunts and uncles visiting, everybody will – even later on they, when as an adult, and some aunt, or some uncle from – from **Poland**, when we visited, they remembered me as a child. And I remembered how close they were to our family. So it was a, I would say, more – mostly **[indecipherable]** except that we were not rich, because the army people are not rich, so I knew that from time to time they might have had some problems, financial problems if something extra happened. But I, fortunately, I don't remember any big sickness in my childhood or my brothers', except for scarlet fever and diphtheria. But at that time there was a kind of – every – every child almost, had it, and you had to be in the hospital, because there was epidemic of scarlet fever, so that they would not allow children to stay home. So I spent some six weeks or something like that in the – in the hospital, but – my brothers, too, at different times. But nothing really tragic.

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Q: How would you describe your parents' relationships to one another?

A: It was – from what I can say, and could feel, there was a great bond between them. It was great respect for my father, and my – my mother also had her husband's respect. Th – I couldn't remember angry voices, but if there were – and I am sure that it's impossible to live through life without any – any little disagreements or something, but I was not aware of any problem of any serious consequences.

Q: Did you have close friends at school?

A: Yes, I had several friends and – and – and one, especially one whose parents were also friends of my parents. He was a famous painter in – in **Poland**, and her mother was not working, was also taking care. But **Barah**(ph) was the only child, so we were very often spending time, either at our house, or at her house.

Q: What was her last name?

A: **Martuszuk**(ph)

Q: **Martuszuk**(ph). How would – you mentioned a little bit that your parents or your family was not particularly well-to-do. Would you sa –

A: **[indecipherable]** the army –

Q: Yeah.

A: – people, you know, kind of difficult, and because the army – **Poland** was then, you know, just rising from the ashes. And I think in **Poland** was starting to build the economy and industry. So it – a regular situation with the army, it's – wasn't that they were not very **[indecipherable]**. Maybe there were people who had some special assignments, or something like that, would get extra money for trouble, or something, a presentation or something. It's not that we're poor.

Q: No.

A: I didn't feel the poverty.

Q: Okay.

A: But no – from knowledge of how the situation was. As an adult I could recognize that we're middle class, well educated, and middle class very much interested in the social and cultural life. But not probably extensively or too often outside of **Poland**.

Q: Did your family own a car?

A: No, we did not own a car. The horses, the **[indecipherable]** or how you call the horses were usually belonged to – to the commander of the battalion, like my father was. And so, we sometimes went on some excursion we went, but we also went – the car also belonged to the unit there.

Q: I see. So sometimes you had use of it.

A: So sometimes we used it, the car.

Q: Did you have a radio at home?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: But there that – that time, was the radio when you – you – with the crystal, when you put the small crystal to here, to connect –

Q: I don't even know what that ra – kind of radio looked like.

A: Not just a – a box with the microphone that you could hear –

Q: Okay.

A: – I mean, behind the screen. And there was the classic things with the – some screw that you tried to correct –

Q: The sound?

A: – the sound to get the connection, because that – you probably only would have the – only the radio from **Lvov**, all the – in **Poland**, but you would have to maneuver to get that thing working.

Q: The signal.

A: Signal.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Tell me a little bit about **Lvov** as a city that you mentioned earlier, seemed to be multicultural.

A: Very much so.

Q: Who wi – and how was it divided, if you would know? First of all, about how large a city was it in the 1930s? How many poppi – people?

A: In – 350,000 before the war.

Q: Okay.

A: And it had about 65 percent Poles, I would say about 20 percent Ukrainians, or maybe less. I would say less, but they had quite a large Jewish section, Jewish – the – the Jews of **Poland** were the – the assimi – most of them were the assimilated Jews, or the Jews who called themselves Poles, and went with us to school. And there were also smal – small sections in **Lvov** – well, small, it's relative, where there were Orthodox places. They had very busy market, very well developed, and they had several synagogues. And was kind of a very prou – **Lvov** was proud of is that they had Armenians, quite a lot of **[indecipherable]** maybe t – five or more thousand Armenians, who are actually, they came to **Lvov** in the 16th century, 17 century, so you couldn't really differentiate that they were Armenians. They had different names, but they had – the cathedral was Armenian cathedral, or Catholic Armenian order, and there was also the Ukrainian cathedral, a very well recognized, very well-known **[indecipherable] Saint George** Cathedral, for the Ukrainians, but they were not ort – Russian orthodox, but they were **Yoonyots**(ph). That was the

reun – in the – at the end of 16th century there was a reunion of the orthodox Ukrainians with the Roman –

Q: Catholic church.

A: – Catholic church, and they recognized the Pope. And so you actually could go to – to the masses, except that they use the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian letters, which –

Q: Rather than Latin.

A: Rather than Latin.

Q: Yeah.

A: But that was different, and especially since lat – in the Catholic church had Latin –

Q: Yes.

A: – so for most of the people who did not know Latin, it was also boring.

Q: Yeah. Did you ha –

A: And then I also about several – quite a – a lot, I don't know what percentage, German, especially Austrian German, because **Galicia** in the – when **Poland** was divided, **Poland** uke – Lithuanian **Ukraine –**

Q: Right.

A: – and **Poland**, the commonwealth was divided between **Russia**, **Prussia** and **Austria**.

Q: Right.

A: So if you know that situation, many of the Austrians came in and stayed, and very often became Poles, even better Poles patriotically than – than some peasants who – peasants or some workers who didn't have schooling or something, that as the ch-change after the war happened, there were many – and during the 19th century there's – you probably know from history, there were several uprising against **Russia** to free **Poland** –

Q: Yes.

A: – and **Lithuania** from Russian tsars at that time. And I know the incidents of people who – was one professor that I read somewhere that small story, one professor at the University of **Lvov**, they were talking about one of the uprising in – in **Poland** in the **[indecipherable]** what they said congress was a part of Russian – Russian part of **Poland** who stepped up the activities, and they said, where I – where are you sons, they asked the professor. He said, he – they are doing the patriotic duty. They went to defend **Poland**, to Russian part. Beca – and he was of Austrian – Austrian parentage –

Q: Origin, yeah.

A: – originally, because many, many of them – as a matter of fact, my – the mother of my girlfriend in **Poland**, her parents lived in **Vienna**, and sometimes she went to visit her. So, there was some **[indecipherable]**

Q: Yeah, some influence.

A: – many of these people became as Polish as –

Q: As the next person, yeah.

A: Right.

Q: In school, did you intermingled, or did your family know any Jewish people?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: I sat with a Jewish girl. I didn't have much in common with some of the girls from – because where – in our neighborhood, I think, were many small shop owners. And they somehow kept much to themselves, Jewish people. But we also have some doctors **[indecipherable]** and some very, very good students, too, and it was like, I would say in the class of 35 or 40 children, there would be at least 15 Jewish children. And when the lessons in religion, everybody was obliged to take – participate, and we had the priest come for the Catholic girls, the rabbi come, take the to another room, or – or we went out to another room. And also Ukraine, or **[indecipherable]** which is the Ukrainians how they called themselves before the –

all the nationalistic fights. But – and then they – and we had couple Protestants girls and there was a church, a Protestant church of **Habsburg** den-denomination. So it was an – a – I cannot remember how many – how many, but I know that I sat – there were two – two girls to each seat, and I was sitting with the – with the girl who was Jewish.

Q: Did your parents talk about politics at home? About what was going on in the country, what was going on in the world?

A: I-I – I think we were well informed, but there were – I had sometimes discussion with my father, what I was like – about medicine, or about something. I that – when my father would come and have his late lunch, because at four o'clock it's neither lunch nor supper. So I would sit and ask of – my mother was very upset. Will you stop talking about all the medical things, or – I don't know why it was of some interest at one point for me. But we discussed probably because of school, and learning and it wasn't somehow forced on us, any patriotic things, or you were ordered by school to march, or to – ordered by – you did some of the things, like celebrate anniversaries and – and ho – hope that **Poland** is honorable with everything, and somehow you knew that there was some bad things happened, you heard about some – somebody murdering somebody, some kind of a trial of someone, which later on, I understand years later proving that it was innocent

person. But anyway, somehow the – it was in the news, so you couldn't help even overhearing what they went to the – to shop, or where they went in – in the tramways, because the tramways were the way the communication was quite well-developed in – in **Lvov**, and –

Q: So – okay. Did you want to finish the thought?

A: Mm, no.

Q: Okay. Did you – were – were **Hitler's** name or **Stalin's** name, were they well known? Did people talk about them, or were they foreign countries, and they would have little effect?

A: No, there was definitely a well-known situation, and I remember during one of my last – maybe not last – in 1938, in vacation, I was in **Warsaw** with my aunt and uncle, the brother of my father. And I also lived with – sometimes they had the house be – residence outside of **Warsaw**. And I remember in '38, at the time of **Czechoslovakia** and **anschluss**, and the speeches of **Hitler**, and how we all felt, you know, all – really with the goose pimples. And –

Q: You fe – you felt?

A: Goose pimples.

Q: Goose pimples.

A: When we heard the voice of **Hitler** talking about his enemies, and how – and then also sometimes on the radio too, you heard the **[indecipherable]** repeating his threats after **Czechoslovakia** and starting to repeat the threats against **Poland**, which some reporters translated it, of course. But also you heard the voices of **Hitler**, it still to my – I think to my dying day, the wor – hearing his voice raises the hair on my back of my head.

Q: Frightening.

A: Frightening, and like if you hear evil, or f – almost subconsciously because at that time we didn't realize what will happen. But the hatred that was coming through was so difficult to – even to understand, that – that amount of threats, or that amount of hatred, or that amount of – and also, on the other hand, my father had a very relaxed or – the way of talking about the army, and about that **Poland** is preparing for difficult times, and we are sure that we will survive, and also would – toward the end, when there were the alliances with **England** and **France**, that we'll have some help and some support from the west, if **Hitler** will attack us. And that they will defend **Poland** to the last drop of blood. And somehow that right would be on our side. **[phone ringing]**

Q: Mm-hm, yeah.

A: And so, in that sense, we looked with some hope to – **[interruption][break]**

Q: So, there are very troubling things that are happening, but also signals that you'll be safe, that things will be okay.

A: Feeling.

Q: Yeah.

A: Feeling hope, and also based on the – our faith, religious faith, and feeling that we were not the people who could cause the war, but rather to defend our honor, but not to kind of being afraid that we are facing such a mighty enemy, and such a ruthless enemy. So unfortunately, this happened. But it still, from what I understand, the Germans, when talking about the September war, 1939 war, in their reports said that some of the bravery was enviable, about Poles before they died, or before they had to leave the post, or something. That's all, there were still monument in some places where was almost like **[indecipherable]**

Q: Yeah.

A: Where everybody would die without giving up the defense. So – and then, also the feeling that we will – the goodness should win in the long run, but we didn't know how the things were.

Q: Okay. I'd like to get a sense of, as August 1939, or as summer 1939 is developing, what is it that you are hearing, what is it that is in the conversations and in the air? Are – are your parents talking more and more about things? And – and

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I'd like to know personally, for you, for your family, where were you, and how did you learn of the war?

A: Well, the instant of the war, I very well remember, the first of September. I – when I came back from my aunt, near **Kraków**, where I spend the vacation, she brought me around sixth or fifth of August. And I knew that the – at that time there were some unpleasant meetings between the German and Russian people, diplomatic, some conferences or whatever, we didn't know yet at that time. And because that war seemed to be imminent, my aunt and uncle brought me home to **Lvov**. And by then my father was not sleeping at home, but staying on his post where he was assigned at part of **Lvov**, at **Lychakiv**, near where his whole unit was at. And my mother took me on the first of September to say hello to my father, because this was around – like around 10 o'clock or so in the morning, to greet **Tadeusz** after coming back from vacation, and to say hello, to see him, but then return without him, with my mother. And I was returning by tram number one. That I remember too, the tram number one was actually traveling from nearby where my father was staying, but he's quite a lot across from where we lived, and by the time we were passing mid-after – sitting in the – in the train and train was going, and we started hearing something like bombs, or some shot – shooting, or something that sounded like thunder, or we didn't know what it was. And close to our church,

which is – which was not too far from the place where we lived, at that number one stopped, and the tramway – and people were trying to watch the planes flying over, and people were saying no, th-these are not Polish, these are not Polish planes. And then we hear some of the bombs breaking sound, and the – the conductor of the tramway said, you have to hurry home and try to get into the basement or somewhere to hide, because this is the – we are attacked from the air by **Germany**. I remember then walking back, I saw a woman – I don't know how I remember that, but carrying a pillow with blood on it. And she said my daughter was hit by – whether by shrapnel, or whether by a brick or something, because of the falling house, that her – her head was on that pillow when her daughter was, and she was crying and carrying before we got to our house. And we – we got to the base – basement, but actually what – later on it was arranged there were some neighbor – neighborhood houses where had bigger basements, much more prep-prep-prepared to take some people in. And so the rest of **[indecipherable]** before the Russians came, before the 22nd of September, when the Russians came to **Lvov**, they entered **Poland** on the 19th of September –

Q: Hang on a second.

A: Ni – no – **Poland**, 17th of September they entered – they crossed the border. By the time they came to **Lvov**, **Lvov** was being surrounded by the German army. And –

Q: Okay, let's stop there for a second, though. You're in – you're in the basement originally, you know, the first one, which is not that well prepared. And if I can just repeat what I understood is, you went to say hello and greet your father on your way back from vacation in **Kraków**, and while you are traveling home on tram number one, the war starts. And –

A: The – the bombardment, the –

Q: The – the – the bombardment comes. So you didn't know the war – war was starting, you just saw the bombs –

A: Saw the – the airplanes –

Q: Planes.

A: – and the people talking th – oh no, these are Polish, oh no, no, these are not Polish airplanes.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then hearing the whistle –

Q: Of the bombs.

A: – of the bombs.

Q: Well, it meant that, I mean, **Lvov** being so far east –

A: Well, it's – but for the airplanes –

Q: Germ – yeah, it's not long. It's not long at all.

A: Not only that, you have to remember that **Poland** was surrounded from three sides. Only the Russian border was not use – being used as an army for **Germany**. **Czechoslovakia** was taken, and **Slovakia** was a **Hitler** friend. That's the south of **Poland**.

Q: And of course –

A: **Prussia**.

Q: Yeah.

A: **Prussia** was the German place of Teutonic knights, which you know, as Lithuanian Teutonic knights –

Q: Right.

A: – to that part of – of what was **Poland** at one point. So the north part, and all the –

Q: West.

A: – all the west.

Q: Yeah.

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A: So the – the – **Poland** was like taken into squeeze. So I don't know whether these planes came from – maybe from **Czechoslovakia**, which wasn't too far.

Q: That's true.

A: And – but the – the advance was swift.

Q: Well tell me – tell me then, in those three weeks, if it started from the first –

A: Three –

Q: – until the – until the Russians enter on the 17th, they cross the border –

A: Yes, but the war was still going on, the **Poland** did not surrender until the 29th of S-September, **Warsaw** fell.

Q: Okay, what I'm interested in is what is happening with you and your family in this environment. So, in those three weeks, where were you, where were your younger brothers, where was your mother, and where was your father?

A: My father was at his post, and from time to time was sending us, either through his adjutant or some telephone that everything is all right with him, and to take care, and hope for the better, that the German, as a matter of fact, stopped – were stopped around **Lvov**, they could not enter **Lvov**. And then there was a day of quiet, the 22nd. The – actually the evening of 21st, all the ar-artillery fire, because this was constantly, we had constant air raids, and constant, at one point wa – when the **Germany** was surrounding **Lvov**, constant battle.

Q: So did you stay at home? Did you stay in the cellar?

A: We stayed at home on the first floor.

Q: Okay.

A: And went to s – no, we didn't go to school.

Q: Okay.

A: The school were – was sto –

Q: Stopped?

A: – closed. And – but I remember going to visit my friend and spending some time, when – but one of the things that – that my parents, probably every parent was trying to get some preparation, some food storage for something that will take longer.

Q: That's right, that wouldn't spoil.

A: That is it not – right. That – so very often it was to go – this is still the Russians are not in.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then the – on the 22nd, they enter **Lvov**. There is no more bombardment, there is no more artillery fight. But the other things started to –

Q: Happen.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Okay. So I'm going to try and repeat what I – what I think I understand, is that in those first weeks, the Germans have surrounded **Lvov**, and there's fighting.

A: Only the last few days before they – the Russians came. The –

Q: Okay, so until then, in those first two weeks –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – let's say 14 - 15 days, there was no fighting in **Lvov**?

A: Not inside **Lvov**.

Q: Not inside. And – and so was – was there food still, were the stores filled, were – did people go out in the streets?

A: Yes, the –

Q: Okay.

A: – would be like – you probably have seen some of the films showing **Britain**. You know, there – there were bombardments, although they were not surrounded by the Germans, but at – at the time when bombardments, the s – the s-sirens were –

Q: Right.

A: – **[indecipherable]** and then you run to the basement.

Q: Okay.

A: And then the sirens would sound again, and you would go back to your apartment. But then, toward the end when **Germany** surrounded **Lvov**, which was,

I think five days before, or maybe more, I can't **[indecipherable]** or I would look at the book, and we would know. But a – a – around few days, there was a constant, about 10 day – now I remember, 10 days, because my mother saying 10 days that we were staying and sleeping in the basement.

Q: So you were under siege. At that point you were under siege.

A: Right.

Q: And could wa – could I – would it be accurate to understand that the Germans – the n – th-the German Wehrmacht more or less conquered the city for the Russians let them in?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: No.

Q: Okay, so –

A: They – they – from what I gather –

Q: Okay.

A: – from historic point of view, I am somehow amateur historian, and there was meeting with the Russians on the 21st of September.

Q: Between the Germans and the Russians?

A: Between Germans and Russians.

Q: Okay.

A: At first when we n – we learned about Russians coming in, from the news, but wha-what kind of news could come while was in – in wartime is very difficult to say what is true and what not. But at that time, in a sense, we were puzz – Poles were puzzled: why the Russians come? There was an alliance between **Poland** and **Russia** in 1933 – 32 first, and completed in '34 for non-aggression pact. So supposedly we were free on the east, but unfortunately, the Russians broke it. To this day they say there was no war. So, for example, the prisoners of war who had been killed, are not recognized the victims of the war to that kind of – some kind of the defense that Russian would, after finally admitting that it was Russians, at first they said th-the – the German forces came with the po – the Russian prisoners of war who are in **Russia**. But at that time there were no Germans in **Russia**.

Q: So, if there was a bombardment of – of **Lvov**, and all of a sudden it becomes quiet, how do you explain that? Did the Germans retreat and allow the Russians to come in?

A: We didn't see them retreat, wis – we heard stoppage of the artillery fire.

Q: Okay.

A: And then the eerie kind of quiet. We didn't know what to expect from left to right, whether the bombs coming, or whether the artillery will be taken. And we, at that time, most of the people didn't think that the Russians came as friends.

Q: So what – when was the first time you saw a change? When was the first time you saw the Russian army come –

A: Immediately.

Q: What happened?

A: The – marching into it, and they – often the pre-war communist people put on the red band on – on the arms, and turned into militia, and immediately would have – the traffic would be stop because they would go into the stores that had food, and would get everything out, and I don't know whether to take to **Russia** or to feed the germ – the soldiers. But immediately we felt there was some lack of food, started they all – they started to – how you would call it? Give a special cards to go and buy bread or some –

Q: Rationing.

A: Rationing of food. And also – and so the army, who, I think it was almost to pretend that they were poor army men, because they were not as dressed when you take the pictures of these people who came, they were very poorly dressed, the – the arms are like they car – the shoot –

Q: The guns.

A: The guns were sometimes tied with strings or something, you could see, and the people who were passing were – looked not so much unfriendly, but very much incommunicado. And also the chaos of some of the people, the lower elements of society, starting to, you know, to take advantage of whatever, to – whether they were stealing, or some, that I don't know.

Q: Looting, that sort of thing.

A: Right.

Q: Okay. So would you say there was a – for a little while there was a vacuum of authority, and it was just chaotic –

A: Yes.

Q: – even though the army was there?

A: The Russian army came in.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: But our army was taken immediately, our prisoners of war. There were no Polish soldiers.

Q: So after you had said hello to your father when you came back from vacation, did you see him again?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: Because he was always on the post.

Q: Okay. All right. And was he taken as a prisoner of war?

A: He was taken from – we got a small piece of card – piece of paper, carried by some of the soldier who were let go, some of officers were immediately taken, but soldiers not always. And some of them got nearby, the camp outside of **Lvov**, where they kept the Polish officers, and – and the – you know, surrounded them, and took off their insignia, and told them that they are prisoners of war, and not to get into the ta – into touch with – with relatives. So this soldier brought a small piece of paper that I am healthy, I am all right. Please take care of the children and of yourself and God protect you and a couple of words like that. And then a couple of days later, somebody else went who was one of the students at the university, who was part of this young people preparing for defense –

Q: Yes.

A: – re – not in the army, but –

Q: You mentioned that, yeah.

A: Right?

Q: Yeah.

A: So he told – and he – not me, my mother, that the saw – he went close to – **Viniki**, was a small town outside **Lvov** – well, actually resort town. And there they were kept under – within a wire – wired section. But he saw this taking of the insignia, and they could not come close and talk to them. But somehow, if I remember, he just might have spoken something. And then, afterwards, nothing.

Q: Nothing.

A: Nothing at all until we learned later on that they were being transported by foot to **Tarnopol**, which was like closer to the Russian border – Ukrainian, but actually it was Russian border, and – about 200 miles or so, and they were put on the trains there. And from what I know the story, later on that I learned, but only in December, or late November, we got a card from **Starobilsk** in **Ukraine**, near **Kiev**, that a – a – a – a letter – a small – a small card, that they were promised that they could write once a month on the card. No letters, but just a card. A-And he wrote to us that some of the friends of ours, friends who are with him, are the friends of the man who was living in – with the apartment above us. He was the judge of appellate court, and quite well recognized. And so my father wrote that the friends of Mr. **Oyuk**(ph) are with us also. So it's not only soldiers that were taken prisoner, because reserve was taken, Polish reserve, going into the army, and among the reservists you had doctors and judges and – and all part of this society. So –

Q: And then?

A: Then there was another couple of let – short cards, that I am all right. We send some packages. You could – you could send, I don't know ho-how many, if my mother send, probably did, because at the beginning of April –

Q: 1940 – 19 –

A: – no cause – because they did not come every month –

Q: Yeah.

A: – these cards, so we didn't know much. But at beginning of April 1940, came a telegram from couple of officers, to him, and to his friends who were officers of other units, please don't write to u – to us. Don't send any packages or letters, we are being moved in an unknown destination. About new address, we will let you know. It was the last thing that we got from my father. And it was – just happens that it was close to the day, 13th of April, 1940, when the **NKVD**, that's the police – Russian police, and some communist, local communist and translator came with – early in the morning and took us – came to us and said, you have half an hour to get up and to get down to the lorry that's waiting outside to take you by train to **Siberia**.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: Then I started crying, because I realized – which a – I think I mentioned that I ro – told the story to **Allen Paul**, who wrote the book about **Katyn** – at that time, I was 12 years old – at I – that time, I realized that just now, my father is being put into another place, and we are going to **Siberia**, and that we ge – will get lost, and we'll never meet. And I couldn't – I was really hysterical, almost. And the man who was interpreter, and also he was the driver of the truck, and he was upstairs, and he was trying to tell me don't worry, don't worry, you are going where your father is, so you will see your father there. And so that somehow made me stop.

Q: What was the behavior of those other soldiers who marched in, of the **NKVD**? How wa – what was their manner?

A: Well, first of all, we were undressed. My brothers were still asleep, because my mother woke me up with the – upstairs there was an – how you call? Search **[indecipherable]** house, that we li – the Russians were upstairs, because the – you could hear the –

Q: The footsteps.

A: – the footsteps, and somehow what we set – search – searching the house.

Q: I see.

A: And couple of – like an hour later, Mrs. **Oyuk**(ph), with her three children, was going down, and called my mother, on – rang the bell. My mother came to the door

– this is like six o'clock in the morning – came to the door, and she said, please, go to church. Our church – my mother –

Q: Right.

A: – Mrs. – Mrs. **Oyuk's** mother is usually there. Please tell her that we are being taken to **Siberia**. And went down with the **NKVD** people. And about maybe half an hour later, or maybe less, we heard this bang on the door with pistols, or whatever hard things, they kicked the door. And so we – or, I was awake, because my mother woke me when Mrs. **Oyuk**(ph) came, and my brothers were still sleeping. And they came and said, half an hour, get dressed, and take some of the basic things, and get down to the truck. Unfortunately, my mother somehow panicked. She didn't know what – what do you take to **Siberia**? What do you take what you have, especially since, you know, after this September month, lot of our food, what we had prepared was gone. And then also, at that time, we had an influx of communists from the eastern – from the western part of **Poland**, who came to **Lvov**. There were many refugees who came from the western part of **Poland**. And the communists, when the – when the Russians came in, organized the rooming places, ordering the people who own the apartment to take all to – not only ordering, sometimes during the night they opened the door and let some people, and said, these are communists, they are going to **Russia**, they are waiting for their visas, but they're – you have to

take care of them. They were the refugees, but most of these people were communists who were, as they expressed it, they were waiting to go to paradise, you know, Russian paradise. So, at that time, the – there was eight men and one woman, a wife of one of them. And she realized that my mother didn't know – she wasn't dressed. The soldier for bed – forbade my mother to close the bathroom door, that she could dress and no – get all together that we could dress. And he stood at the door, open door, and they wouldn't give us any keys to the attic, where we had our luggage, that we could use it. They were afraid to leave us without the **[indecipherable]**. So the woman who was the wife of this communist from **Lódz**, I believe, she realized – she took the capes, or covers of a bed, spread out and put some pillows and some clothing. She opened the shelves of some of the chest – chest of drawers, she took some of the things and threw in, and tied it as a bundle.

Q: So in other words, your mother was in a state of shock.

A: Yes. But in the sense, how do you know when you suddenly awakened and you are told you have to pack up – for the children, you know, my brothers were – one was 10, and one was seven. So the small children, you have to – what do you take?

Q: Yeah.

A: You think of clothing, or the – a good thing, as an example was that – was our truck, because we had such little things, so few things this woman put for us,

although there were two big bundles, but – and we had the small dog, the Chihuahua, little Chihuahua with us, we take. The first time that I heard this dog to – moaning, when they came in, this dog, the small, you know, kind. But we were to wait for the – next door was a banker's family; the wife of a banker and her son, who finished – was just finished high school, about. I – I don't think we knew each other very well, we just recognized ourselves at the – were taken on the same truck. But we waited there two and a half hours, or maybe more. When – this young man had a good head on his shoulders. He put vodka in front of these Russian soldiers, on the table, and they started saying, take anything of value; like jewelry, like silver, or things that you can sell in – in – in **Russia** for – for –

Q: Food.

A: – food, for anything. And they really – they filled three-fourths of the **[indecipherable]** with their baggage for two people, and we had four, and we had just small things. So, somehow – and also the sa – depended on the people, **NKVD** people. There were people – some people realized that this is a mother with the children, and you know, somehow followed orders, or somehow had the human instinct dictate a little bit, the dic – the behavior.

Q: Well, in what way was the human instinct shown?

A: Well, that this man allowed this young boy to somehow entertain themselves, talking to them.

Q: Okay.

A: In the meantime, they were advising what she should take, what is possible for her to take.

Q: For your mother, or for his family?

A: No, no, no, this –

Q: His family.

A: – this family. We stayed in the –

Q: The truck.

A: – on the truck.

Q: Yeah.

A: So we learned there were different – different people also, in helping.

Q: So – so right after you get this telegram that says we'll tell you what our address is, you get the knock in the night, or the – now early morning.

A: Well, I – it was 13th – the beginning of April, was the telegram.

Q: The tele – telegram. And on the 15th –

A: And actually, from what later we learned –

Q: Yeah.

A: – it was the first – fourth or fifth day of April that they started taking people out of the camp, **Starobilsk**, driving them to another place, where they didn't know.

Q: Okay.

A: Where they were killed.

Q: So do you think that by the time you were deported, your father had already been a –

A: No, no.

Q: No.

A: It was when – he might have been in the first group, you know, in the – the – there were close to 4,000 prisoners.

Q: Yeah.

A: So they did not take all at once, so they were series. And I don't know whether he was in first series or – can't – can't learn about it. But we only knew from that man that the chauffeur of – of the truck, he said, don't cry, don't cry, you are going where your father is. You will fe – see your father. So he – nobody knew, you know, only regular people did not know what the intentions of the **Stalin** and **[indecipherable]** were.

Q: I'd like to follow that thread about your father first, and then we'll come back to you and the truck. When was it that you found out a – something about your father's fate? At what point was this? Was this still during the war, or after the war?

A: We learned, as the news was spread in 1943 –

Q: Okay.

A: – when the Germans, going back from **Russia**, they – they went the one – they almost took **Moscow**, but then they started withdrawing. And when they came near **Smolensk**, which is that **Belarus** now –

Q: Yeah.

A: **Byelorussia**, right? He – they were told by some local people that there was, at one point in 1940, in the spring of 1940, some shooting and – but they couldn't really see it, because this was on the place where the **NKVD** had the private houses, they had some, you know, from what I understand, near – and – and the prisoners who were in ca – **Katyn**, were the prisoners from the **[indecipherable]** camp my father was in, which was near – in the **Byelorussia**, near **Smolensk**. And my father was taken to **Ukraine**, on the southern part. You know, th-they divided the group of people picking up the northern part of – northeastern part of Poles, and the nor – nor – southeastern part of Poles. And – and they started digging, or they were saying that some dog brought a human bone somewhere. And the people – but people did

not want to say, or somehow kept it in such a way that the Germans started feeling awkward about this – the whole thing. And they came to a place which was like the to – you planted trees in a very orderly manner, and new grow – growth, and they started digging. And they opened **Katyn**. So the news started on the 13th – can you imagine the coincidence – 13th of April of 1943, when **Germany** was withdrawing from **Russia**, the Germans were talking about finding people and giving the names because they had the papers of these people, and they inquired – asked for the international Red Cross, from the people, where some American prisoners of war were being taken and shown it. There was a very famous person from **Italy**, who was some scientist, who was asked to be the witness as they were recovering this close to 4,000 bodies lying in there, but – and there was a question, when did it happen? And the Russians res – in response to that – we are already out of **Russia**, so we don't know exactly Russian news, but the Russians are insisting that this is **Goebbels'** and **Hitler's** policy to break up the friendship between **Russia** and **England**, who are now allies. And they are reading openly on the radio in **Kraków** and in **Warsaw**, the names of the people whom they found. And the people from the international Red Cross – actually was the – more of a French Red Cross, because when Poles wanted international Red Cross, the Russians broke with the

Polish **émigré** government that was staying in **London**, as the continuous Polish government, independent **Poland**.

Q: Yeah, yeah, mm-hm.

A: So that started writing books and news spread out. But by the time ’43 – must have been toward – well, ’40, I was, by then already in **Africa**, in the camps, but out of **Russia**, and out of **Persia**, and in **Africa**. So it was – it took another year and a half when I saw a small – not leaflet, a small bic – bulletin, with the pictures of these – of what happened, and – but it was only of **Katyn** – **Katyn**, and the names did not bel – not – we did not get the list yet, it took years after. But from what I understand, this was the only camp that was discovered by the Germans, and that had the name of **Katyn**, but then afterwards, in 1990, when **Perestroika** started, **Gorbachev** brought the letters showing that there were the camps of **Starobilsk**, which was in **Ukraine**, and **Ostashkov**, which was little bit north of **Smolensk**, where more of a police – Polish police, the pre-war Polish police was there, there were about 6,000 people. He gave that – that – the Polish people knew what happened to these prisoners of war.

Q: So does that mean – was your father’s name amongst those in 1990 that you found?

A: At that time, yes, there were books. Already they were printing the – the first – they started printing from what they knew from the Polish sources who was arrested by the Germans – by the Russians. And probably was only one man who started a book, I don't remember exactly what, but it was much later that he published the names of the people who were –

Q: Arrested.

A: – that are victims of – of murder, because –

Q: I'm – I'm still – I'm sorry to interrupt, but I'm a little confused. In the mid-1940s, you learn of **Katyn**, but your father's name isn't amongst them.

A: Because they did not yet dig up.

Q: Right. Then, for 50 years you don't know anything.

A: No.

Q: And in 1990, **Gorbachev** provides additional information.

A: Well, with the camps, what happened to the people from the camps, like my father's camp.

Q: Okay.

A: That he was taken to **Kharkov**.

Q: He was taken to **Kharkov**.

A: And the – they murdered people in **Kharkov**, **NKVD** building, and took the bodies to the place, like **Plakihatki**(ph), which is a small surrounding, supposedly luxurious woods, and **dachas**, Russian **dachas**, and that was what later proved to be a big cemetery also for the Ukrainians from the previous persecutions. And – but at that time, we had the list, because they came with the list, also who was in the ca – in those camps.

Q: Okay. But they came with the lists only after **Perestroika**, in 1990?

A: I suppose so. That was –

Q: Okay, so in other words –

A: – only the German – the – we d – didn't get any documents about other camps. There were suggestions that near – that some children playing in some small town near **Starobilsk** found the Polish uniforms, buttons, you – officers' buttons, and – and – so somehow there was, you know, gossipy kind of things, but sometimes this was built on the truth, but somehow you couldn't believe it because it was half quiet, you could not repeat that very much. If you would repeat that, you would probably find yourself in some gulags.

Q: Yeah.

A: So the Russians were also – somehow did not touch the subject.

Q: So did you ever conclusively find out specifically where your father met his end?

A: No, when he was on the list of **Starobilsk** victims who were taken to **Kharkov**.

Q: I see, so that's what the – he was s – he was individually mentioned on that list.

A: Right. As a matter of fact, there was a mistake, they put my father's name twice, because once they put him as a retired captain, and my mother – this writer, who was putting the names from just the Polish sources, the names who might have been in these camps, he lived in **London**. My mother lived in lon – **London** at the time, in – at the **Gorbachev**, you know, the 1990. So, my mother wrote to him that there is a mistake, my – my father was in active duties. But the – when they crossed – they did not cross his name, so he is twice –

Q: I see.

A: – in there; once in reservist, and once – in the retired, and once in the active duty.

Q: Okay.

A: The same person, with the same father and the same mother.

Q: All right. I want to be able to understand this because it's still a little confusing. It's only in 1990s, I don't know whether it's 1990, '91 or '92 when **Gorbachev** releases documents that it is established that your father was from the camp, and he went to **Kharkov** – he was taken to **Kharkov** and then he was executed, and he is giv – and it's on a list that the Russians provide, by name. Somebody at that point,

is writing a book. A Polish person who is writing a book and it originally has him down as retired, but your mother sees this, and corrects it. Is the book published? Is that – does she see –

A: The book was published by **[indecipherable]** the author was **Mischinsky**(ph). He lived – he wa – I think he was an army person too, and he was connected with the Polish government in exile, in **London**.

Q: Okay, but my question is: did you get this document from **Gorbachev**?

A: No.

Q: That is, was that sent to the family members?

A: No, this was – this was like a public knowledge.

Q: So you – you were able to see it from someplace and then – and then later you saw it in a book?

A: No, not really see it.

Q: You never saw it?

A: No, he – I had the book written by this man before **Gorbachev**. Mr. **Mischinsky**(ph) was making his assumption, or he had some inkling who was in the camps, from letters, from some –

Q: I see.

A: – on – probably connecting with the widows, or –

Q: Okay.

A: – women, or relatives, and they had the army, probably, in-intelligence. Army intelligence knew who were most of these people.

Q: So did you already have – did you already have an educated guess of where – what had happened to your father, and the document that **Gorbachev** provided, or the documents that he provided, or the archives that he opened, only confirmed it for sure?

A: Only confirmed –

Q: I see. Okay.

A: – that – that he was in – that the people who died in **Kharkov** were the people from **Starobilsk**. And the people who died – were in **Ostashkov**, died in **Mierdnoya**(ph).

Q: I see.

A: So it's another place. So there were three main camps that **Gorbachev** – beside the first camp that the Germans discovered.

Q: Wow.

A: Because **Gorbachev** then – and started with the denouncing of **Stalin**. At first it was only the – that **Stalin** did it, but then afterwards it was kind of –

Q: Yeah.

A: – government sponsored murder.

Q: Let's go back to you're taken – you're on the trucks, you're – you have a neighbor that has more bundles than you do, and what happens to you and your brothers and your mother after that?

A: Well, we're taken to the station at **Lvov**, but not the regular train, but the – how you call – trade –

Q: Mm-hm, freight train.

A: Right. Where they have cattle trains, or – or standing there long, I would say several trucks with empty car. But already by that time when we came, because this woman with the – took longer, so it is now probably around 10 o'clock or 11. As a matter of fact, this was – must have been around that time, because we had a nun who was thrown out by the so – Soviets, threw out the nuns from the nunneries, and monks from the – and they were homeless and without any way to live, and she had – she was a teacher of French, and my mother gave her a job of coming and teaching – teach us French – me, I don't know whether my brothers participated. Maybe just halfway. And she came, and I remember seeing her face. She was an elderly woman, seeing us on the truck, and surrounded by the **NKVD** soldiers, and she is just to enter our – our apartment – apartment house, to go up –

Q: To teach you.

A: – to teach us. And early – wordless, without a word, watching with a terrible feeling in her face, pained. So I remember that too, so it must have been about 10 o'clock or 11 when she was coming for lesson, and then we had her eat lunch. And so, you know, su-supporting all these nuns who were thrown out of the places –

Q: Yeah.

A: – of living, of monasteries.

Q: So, by the time –

A: And they take ma – the train –

Q: Yeah.

A: – train station. Chao-Chaotic situation. Thousands and thousands of people crying, shrieking, calling names, getting lost because at the time it was – if I remember correctly, it was fairly rainy April couple of days. So the trucks were in between the mud, it was mounted. And then they – the soldiers, not necessarily **NKVD**, regular soldiers, probably the army soldiers, were pushing people into the cars. And it was little bit higher then, you know, not –

Q: Right.

A: – you – you didn't have steps, th-they were pushing, and people were disoriented. I remember seeing my aunt and her son in one place, but we just – I don't know whether we waved, but my mother said we – that she waved to us. She

was taken to another train, or another cart. But anyway, wi – it was so ca – difficult to express, like a tragic situation when you can imagine thousands of people being thrown out of their houses, whether with some luggage, or not luggage, but taken and thrown into this, without knowing what happened, why that happened, and where they are going. Because we were not given, really, an address or anything. And we stayed – the – the truck had bank – benches on two ends, three levels. In the middle was a hole that you could use as a bathroom. Hole in the wa – in the floor, and the – since it was still fairly cold, there was an – a small iron – how you would say –

Q: Stove?

A: Stove.

Q: Okay.

A: To hold for the heating up, except that we didn't have – you had to heat it by wood, but we didn't have enough of wood, and they didn't bring us wood, but that – that's beside the point, but we were all crowded. Some people brought with them a little bit of food, so the first – the first day, all – that was Friday the 13th. Saturday morning we – the train started, one after another, you could see the lines. And each one had about 20 tru – 20 –

Q: Wagons.

A: – wagons going. And then the people started praying, and they started singing religious songs. And crying, you know, kind of – you know, you could expect the people of – in despair. So that started our three weeks of travel.

Q: What was with you and your mother and your brothers? Were you – did you get a bunk?

A: We got the bunk. I was on the upper bunk, and below was the – I don't remember wa – **Richard**, that son of this woman, the banker's son, where he was in, because I was on the upper, and was my mother, my brother slept on the third, I think. I – I really do not – it's a blank. But very often I spend the time with **Richard**, looking through the grated window, small window in the – in the wagon, and, you know, talking and describing. We were – he was, you know, a young boy, I was 12 years old, but I somehow was interested in many things. We kept a kind of a friendship on – during that ride.

Q: Did you describe – do you remember what it is you saw through those slats?

A: Yeah, the – what we saw were – actually, from what I understand, they – the Russians widened the tracks because **Poland** had the tracks like western **Europe** –

Q: Right.

A: And Russians had the wide tracks.

Q: Right.

A: So once they changed the tracks, we were going through some big cities. I remember **Kiev**. I remember some – some other – if I look at the map, **Fufond**(ph), and we coming to the **Ural** mountains and then **Magnitogorsk**, which is a center of Russian industry, steel industry, and – and then the **Omsk** and **Tomsk**. But this was actually si – at once, they wouldn't let us – when we were still on the Polish territory, they wouldn't let us out of that –

Q: Wagon.

A: – wagon. And it's only after some days maybe, when we reached Ukrainian side, they would let us go and relieve ourselves sometimes, but if we were passing a place that there were like bushes around, or – or trees, or **[indecipherable]**. But otherwise they were, you know, hurry, hurry, hurry, and they would bring – usually toward the end of the day, they would bring us in the pails, some kind of soup which was watery mixed vegetables, and very hard, Russian bread, you know, like –

Q: Yeah.

A: – you don't want to be hit by it. It's a kind of – but still, when you hungry – sometimes you could get it, and sometimes they didn't get it, and so we were given that, and not every day. So the people who had some food, brought – like this lady might – might have been advised by these people to take some – some food to take

on the train. So some people were lucky, or had been clear-minded, that they had – I remember my mother said that she left the cooking of the tripes from the previous day, because it's a two days' meal that you have to prepare, and I didn't like it, as a child. Oh, good thing my mother didn't take it, because I wouldn't eat it. But that was at the beginning. And then afterwards, one woman had the can of tripes, and she opened it, and she gave it to the children, one spoon each. And it was so good. Until I reached – really, I reached **America**, when some of the Polish people having their parties, and they had the tripes and I could finally feel – and we had also one woman who was quite elderly. She must have been in her 90s. She was alone, but she had a nurse taking care of her at – at home. She was a daughter of some man who lived in our apartment house, above – across from us, who was arrested by – because I – during these months, there were constant arrests, people taken to prisons, all that. As a matter of fact, on the – December eight, which is my birthday, we visited my uncle, who was retired general, and my aunt was crying. Why? Because day before they arrested him and took him to prison. And as a matter of fact, he was also one of the victims, but of another – in **Vicovnya**(ph), which recently was opened up on the Russian, near **Kiev**, that it was the prisoners, who were not prisoners of war, but prisoners who were taken to full prisons. When the – **Germany** attacked **Russia**, Russians were in panic, and were taking all trains and

all the families, because they had moved the families back to **Poland**. And so they didn't have enough room to take prisoners to **Russia**, and they would shoot the prisoners and throw them through the windows of the – of the prison, and from what I know from eyewitnesses, that they were one level, or two levels high, dead bodies, the Russians killed some of the things. And I know that was – **Brigitki** was the name of the prison. And my uncle was in **Brigitki**, but I – of course, we didn't know these things, because by then when – when **Germany** attacked **Russia**, we were already in **Russia**, in **Kazakhstan**, so we were too far, so we didn't know what was happening. But anyway –

Q: There was an old woman on the train who had a nurse –

A: And her son was arrested, and many, many more people who were owners of land, who were rich shop owners, who were intelligence, or who were –

Q: Intelligentsia, you mean.

A: Intelligentsia was, of course, who – the enemies of the Soviet society.

Q: Were there any Jewish people on the trains?

A: Yes, there were Jewish people too, it's – because Polish society, in a sense, was very much **[indecipherable]** about 10 percent of pole – Poles – **Poland** were the Polish Jews. In the eastern part of **Poland**, they were most in small shtetls. They were mostly Orthodox Hasidic Jews who did not assimilate. But they were mostly

in **Lvov**, in the cities. Many people had great many friends, which wasn't – depended, of course, on the individuals, but they were also the enemies of the societies, some lawyers, some doctors were taken into the camp. I didn't – this woman, the banker's wife was Jewish and **Richard** was Jewish. But that was somehow an – just occurred to me later on that they must have been Jewish because of – for some reason, I don't know what made me think about it, that – that I – somebody said that the father was Jewish, so I thought that the family was Jewish. But they were on the same – in the same truck, and there were some of them taken, although there was also a lot of these people like this, who were located in our apartment, who were waiting to go to **Russia**.

Q: I see.

A: Some free on the – you know, getting to – to the paradise –

Q: Yeah.

A: – of – of, you know humanity paradise, or whatever they call it. So some of the Jews, in great numbers, escaped to **Russia** and stayed throughout the war. Some of them returned to **Poland** after the war. But they were saying about hundreds of – hundreds of thousands of people who landed in **Russia**, but some of them landed as we did land –

Q: That's – they were deported.

A: – as Polish citizens.

Q: Yes.

A: As the Polish citizens.

Q: I want to go back to when you were talking about hunger on the train, and a woman who opens the tripe can and gives children a – you mentioned something about an old woman –

A: Yes.

Q: – and we didn't finish about –

A: Oh yes, I'm sorry, yes.

Q: That's okay.

A: And what I remember, she was already s-senile, and she kept on crying, water, water, water. She wanted a drink, and we didn't have too much of that luxury. And with her the situation was different because this woman was not her relative. But when the **NKVD** came to take her, they wouldn't take her as a nurse. She said, I am her cousin. Then they took her on – that she swore that she is her cousin, to take care of this woman. So she went willingly –

Q: Wow.

A: – to take care of this woman.

Q: Wow.

A: And she survived this three weeks of train. Three weeks of – there were – we were aware, but not in our wagon, people who died. So the Russians threw them out while the trains were going. There were children who were born, and died, and – but not in our wagon.

Q: Wagon.

A: And then we arrived on the first of May at **Zhangiztobe**. We went through the **Ural** mountains, **Omsk** and **Tomsk**, and then **Novosibirsk**, if you know a map, from **Novosibirsk**, which in my eyes was beautifully lighted and was considered a showplace of – the Soviets were showing off, and we were not allowed, of course, to walk on the station. And stayed there for several hours, and then we went down to **Semipalatinsk**, which is entering the **Kazakhstan**.

Q: Okay.

A: And we came to **Zhangiztobe**, which is about 200 or maybe more miles after **Semipalatinsk**, but this is same part, **Tinskaya**(ph) **Oblast**(ph). And fro – we came there, and as the lorries from the previous transport, previous train came, and people were removed on the trucks, taken into the distance, and were on the trucks. But when it came to our transport, they did not have any trucks left. So they waited for the Cossacks with the – with the carts, to be driven by oxen, and take us into the distance. And we were on these trucks for – I – I think around 10 days, or eight days

and eight nights. And as a matter of fact, this old lady, fell – the – that – the cart – when – one of the carts, when we were traveling, went through the river, there were no bridges, but the cart wheels broke on the river – within the river, and she fell into the river, with her things. People saved her, put her back on truck. She came later on to – to the place where they dropped us, and lived for another weeks, and died there. Not knowing – she was asking her nurse, did you – did you correspond with the hotel where we are going to stay? Because she didn't know. She knew she was going somewhere. And did you know what is it, the name of the place where we are going? Because she – she – before the war, she traveled a lot, she was very – probably a fairly rich family, so she was thinking she is going for a ride. So imagine this woman, who took care of her, went with her. And when the woman died, she put in a small – a small cemetery, what they made at the time, in the Cossacks – mostly Cossack collective farms.

Q: Yeah.

A: But that's the **kolkhoz**.

Q: Yeah.

A: Russian collective farms are **sovkhoz**.

Q: Yeah.

A: But collective farms **kolkhoz** belongs to the people who are – these were mostly **Kazaks**, **Kazakhstan**, and few elderly Russian families. And this woman, a younger woman, and – when the – like through the **[indecipherable]** so long ago I can't – I wouldn't recognize her, of course. She escaped from there, she almost got back to **Poland**, and she was caught, and she was bought bra – back. She was innocent, helping this woman, old woman. She escaped because she had actually –

Q: She had done her job, yeah.

A: – somehow sh – I – you know, she – she should have been too, she didn't – she didn't do anything against the Russians, or e – but she wasn't –

Q: Well, nobody did.

A: Nobody did.

Q: Yeah.

A: But you know, but being intelligentsia, or being the family of army – of army – of – or family of – of police, or intelligent, or in the jury – so you had –

Q: In the court system, yeah.

A: Right, the system was completely, you know, you belong to somebody, to who – just –

Q: Yeah.

A: And she was a nurse, and not elderly, I would say she must have been in her late 30s or 40s. And she escape by foot. Somehow she got – she paid somebody truck – somebody on the – on the people – Cossacks who took her to the station. We were about 200 miles from this **Zhangiztobe** station from which they drove us.

Q: Okay. So what happened then? Where did you land, what did you have to do? Did anybody by that point explain why you were there?

A: No. No, there was no explanation. You don't have the – you – you deal with the – with the unseen situation who accuses you of what, you don't know. We didn't feel guilty about anything.

End of File One

Interview with Maria Pawulska Rasiej
May 8, 2013

Beginning File Two

A: – they dropped us into the public place, like a cover – not **covadai** – like a meeting place of that **kolkhoz**, a-and we had na – some people had the blankets, and they separated each other, we had the floor to sleep on, and there were no beds, nothing. And for privacy, among about, I don't know, 25 or 30 families were left there. Some other people were taken into another **kolkhoz**. So we sa –

Q: So you were on this collective farm.

A: Collect – some of **kolkhoz** –

Q: Yeah.

A: – right. Second day, the minister – not the minister, president of **kolkhoz**, the Cossacks comes, you have to go to work, my mother. Didn't say anything to me or my brothers, but you stay home, and your mother has to go to work. And they took women, whatever age they were, adult women, to work. It was making bricks by mixing the soil with – with some drippings from the cows, because this was a **kolkhoz** that was taking care of the cows. And the milk and butter was being sent to the – to the government, or to the whatever it was, but they had their portion to th – to give to the government. And if it was left anything, after the harvest, so a year of work, after the harvest you would get something if the harvest was –

Q: Good.

A: – good. But we were free labor. I mean, we were slaves who came. We couldn't get anything and we didn't have any savings of food or anything by this three weeks of not – traveling on that train. So most of the things at – at first there was a ration and some **Cossacki**(ph) people who liked to trade in. For example, you could go and sell a blouse, or like my mother sold my nighty. I had pink nighty, and a white with some pink flowers. And for that we got a hen that was sitting on the eggs, 10 eggs, which was the best bargain we had because the eggs broke and we had small chicken. And so later on, my mother would take one of the chicken when it grew, to ask some Russian to kill that –

Q: And then you'd have some food.

A: – and we had some food. But otherwise, there was no shops to buy any food. They – not even for the communists who were there, they probably had something –

Q: So where did you keep the chicken?

A: Well, outside is where the – we were, at first, living on the – in the small – they put us with the older Russian family, where she had – she had one room, and we had another room. There was an entrance, and on the other side of entrance was one cow, her old cow that wasn't giving milk any more because it was old cow, and the yard. We lived in –

Q: Oh, so you were moved from the central place where you slept on the floor –

A: Right.

Q: – into this one room.

A: Well, this is like a village.

Q: Yeah, got it.

A: So in the village we were spread out among local people.

Q: Okay.

A: Mostly the Russian. The Cossacks kept to themselves, and they spoke – we didn't speak Cossacks, and – and –

Q: Right.

A: They spoke the Mongolian.

Q: Did your mother speak Russian?

A: No. Not enough. That – that was one of the difficulties. Some people who had spoken Russian, and were enough, so somehow either met some Russian who said you could come here, maybe be a teacher or something, but it – this was too small a village for a very differentiated society.

Q: Sure.

A: So some people somehow, I don't know how, met some Russian who would say well, why don't you give like in case of our friends, with whom he still lives in

Warsaw, I visit him. He was any – anyway, he – he was told to the woman, who spoke beautiful Russian because she was born in **Saint Petersburg** before the war.

Q: Okay.

A: And she was from quite a semi-aristocratic family, her language was beautiful. But then somehow this – by people who were passing the – the place, or somehow, he said, give your son, he will be helping me with my farm. Because they – some people had the smaller –

Q: Right.

A: – or bigger farm. Small farms, which were also part of this, but a little bit outside. And so – and she herself was given a post in the county seat where she was working because she knew Russian. And think that were – saved him, and saved – so for few months, or I don't know how long, they were in that co – in that village with us. But several people slowly were moving. They either let them go, or somebody –

Q: So, with your mother, she was making the bricks – you know, she was having to make those bricks.

A: Right.

Q: And you were alone with your brothers back at the house, back at the little room?

A: Back bu – in the room, in the outside. It's like in the village, open –

Q: Did you do anything? Did you – did they send you to school? What happened?

A: Well, it's – when I was – by then I was 13 and a half.

Q: Well, it sounds to me if you were doing – if you were born in 1926, and you're deported in 1940 –

A: Forty, so I was t –

Q: – you must have been 13.

A: – only 13.

Q: Yeah, 13.

A: And I became th-th –

Q: Fourteen?

A: – 13 and coming to 14 still.

Q: Got it, mm-hm.

A: And I was told that I can go and be a shepherdess for calves, because the policy of that village was that the cows were separated from the – the young ones, because they would not drink milk. Milk was necessary as a selling thing for the government. So the calves had to go somewhere else on the – to eat grass, to be sent out, to be shepherded. And we – when we arrived, as you might know, **Kazakhstan** in that place is steppe.

Q: Yeah.

A: Miles and miles and miles of steppe **[indecipherable]** special places. So we would take about a hundred cows. At first I was one, and there was another – another boy, bigger, and actually there was this boy who went to – to the other – was taken by this man from here.

Q: Right, right, mm-hm.

A: Private work. And then was my brother, at one point. And we would take, at five o'clock in the morning, and push this – these animals, and somehow we managed. We – we slept sometimes in the **[indecipherable]** then – then around noontime, they would lie down and chew like, you know, the normal things after the eating, they –

Q: Right.

A: – have to chew. And sometimes when it was hot, or it was terrible for us, incidents, there were. One of them, they said they – they got a – a bite of a special fly. And then, if it was an – like a leader of this group, of this hundred, there were several big – bigger cows, and several small cows. He would raise his tail and start running.

Q: So if it got bit by this fly, then it runs, and then everything fol – everyone follows?

A: Anyone follows. And we were told we were allo – allowed – permitted to let them go through the fields where they had some wheat, or where they had corn, because they would damage it. So when they run, we run, and then we had to gather them again. I remember that was – kind of things. I remember when I was reading the book I got somewhere from package, because packages could come at that time, from **Lvov**. I got some package, or somebody lent me a book, and I come back from this running, rounding them up, back to the place where we are supposed to stay, and got eating – started eating the book. And then, I am trying to catch him, and I run and he keeps running.

Q: He wants to learn to read.

A: Exactly. To swallow.

Q: To swallow.

A: Anyway, these were first. Then my mother had different job, doing **keezhak**(ph). Did you heard of word **keezhak**(ph)? Since it is the steppes, there are no woods. You cannot buy any wood to burn, and the – and of course, there's no coal.

Q: Yeah.

A: The burning – the material for burning was the old drippings of the cows, that you mix with straw and water. And they have big puddles, like this room, or even

bigger, where the women were wal-walking around with their legs, mixing it up.

Keezhaks(ph). For the people who were running the **kolkhoz**.

Q: So that means it was the fuel to heat?

A: Yes.

Q: That's what it became?

A: You could not – or, of course you could not participate in this local thing for the government, but what we did, we would go, and – and when we were walking with our calves, we saw where the cows went. The cows were usually very much further. By the times we would pass, it was dry so we were picking dry –

Q: Dung.

A: – drippings.

Q: Yeah, mm-hm.

A: Dung.

Q: Yeah.

A: And bringing them. And you could put it as – on this – in the, not oven, but in the – in the kitchen, in the fireplace. And under – you know, they had –

Q: And it could heat a little bit.

A: Little heat from that, that was the only thing. Because otherwise the – the bush, that was very prickly bush that la –

Q: Yeah.

A: – grows in the steppe, is very difficult to really burn for long – it – it's just like a – a eagle – the needle trees that –

Q: Right.

A: – have needles. They just jump –

Q: Right.

A: – into fire, and quickly die. So the other things what you had to find have, you know, piles of these, and that you fed that. And my mother was doing –

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: – with – with the other ladies, mum – one of the thing that was funny wa – from that, with my mother was funny, they were talking about the recipes for cakes.

Q: As they're pounding this dung.

A: On the – how to take your mind off your job. So this was one job. There was another one where there was a big dug up well for the cows were – were close – some – some places where my mother was taken with some other women, to clean this well, because the – it was dug in the soil, it was not a real well, it was just a spot where they kept water. But when the cows were walking down, they were pushing this soil in, so it had a lot of sediment. So my mother was one of those who were standing up to the waist in the water, getting by pails the sediment, pushing to

another woman who was taking the sediment, to have a clear water for cows to drink.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: Then during the harvest, when the – that was a year later, and ow – the winter, the – the snow that was two meters high, that was constant, constant snow falling and cold weather, except that it was dry climate, so you didn't feel that much of the cold, as much as there was a lot of snow. The only thing, the **Buran** that came – **Buran** was the name of the wind, special winter wind that brought the snow. You couldn't see – almost you couldn't see your hand, it was so thick. But also, because if you walked out, you got lost. So the people, to get – to go into real well, that was in the middle of the – you know, a group of houses, had to tie themselves by rope to go it – and to come back. Otherwise they would not –

Q: They'd get lost.

A: – get back.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was winter. But then there was spring, and there was the harvest. And in the harvest my mother was working with the big combine. I don't know whether that's a word in English.

Q: Yeah.

A: The big complicated things, with they sort the wheat from the chaff, and things, and my mother was working somehow. She developed a cold – cough, constant cough. From what I can guess, that at that time, she covered her face with the napkin, but the napkin was full of the small pieces of wheat.

Q: Right.

A: That probably got into her lungs there forever afterwards –

Q: She coughed.

A: – probably, she was coughing. But that – that wa-wa – was her work. And it –

Q: But her p – your poor mother, I mean, to imagine that she loses her husband, she has to take care of three children, she doesn't know where her husband is. She had never worked in such ways before.

A: Right. The woman could not understand. Like she had to paint – some of the houses you painted by making straw with some soil, with some dung also –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and you painted with your hands. All the floors were the dirt floors, there was no wooden floors. And they would say, what kind of a housewife you were when you don't know how to put the floor, the things? Like, this was somehow ridiculous, but this is what you said, how sensitive you are. When I – during – when I wrote the book – helped **Allen Paul** write the book, there was some presentation

of the book, and he asked – and he – there is story of my family and other two or three families, more detailed. And he, **Allen Paul**, asked us to speak. We were in **Washington**, and several senators came, and Polish, you know, consulate – consul and officials listened for it, and so I was started saying how we were taken to **Russia** and that. And then at one point, I said, I have to stop here, suddenly, and stopped this, what I'm talking about, and turn to real heroes of this thing. Imag – now that I am a mother, because back then, it was in 1990 something, I already had five children. Now that I am a mother, I can understand the tragedy of a mother who is – doesn't know where her – food for her children comes, where she could exchange something for some food. You could, for a blouse you could get three potatoes, or some – toward the end, the Russians themselves were hungry, so they would give us a first chaff of wheat. So we burned the chaff on top of the stove that was iron, and put in the water, so the water had the taste, and that was our soup that we ate. And these things happened, and I – I didn't say exactly at that time, but I mean, this was a woman who, as you say, lost her husband, taken to unknown country, thrown into un – inhuman conditions, and sees her children crying of hunger.

Q: And what to do?

A: And what to do? And not knowing what happened to her husband.

Q: Yeah.

A: So that the – this were us – really the heroes for all – children did not – fortunately did not realize how hard things were, how the world is not made of nice stories that you are used to, but situations are different. So children somehow are more – somehow get accustomed to take the best of what situation is, and –

Q: That's one of the things that helps kids survive.

A: Right.

Q: I want to pause just for a second. **[technical discussion]** Okay, we're rolling. So the harvest ends –

A: The harvest ends. The local people who belong to that **kolkhoz** get their parts, what they earned, according to some – their judgments. But we, of course, don't get anything, except that during the year they would give us milk, which was taken – cream, they would take off the milk the – how you call it, the plain –

Q: Right.

A: – milk, because that you could not hold until harvest, so to speak.

Q: Well, this is what I wanted to ask you, whether or not the milk that the cows gave you ever got any of it. So, you were allowed to have some milk from the cows.

A: When we came home –

Q: Okay.

A: – we would get some milk to take to our home.

Q: Okay.

A: That was the – I don't know how much it was. I remember that I tried once to get milk from that old cow, and nothing came. Had – anyway, the winter started, and they said that the – because the harvest was not really poor, but they would somehow let the horsed – the horses who were waiting with the carts to take the wheat to the magazines in the big cities, or wherever they were taking, eat the wheat while waiting. So what was left, they still had to put the taxed amount to the government, and what was left, so very – I think they brought it on themselves to a certain degree, that they didn't have too much to share. And then they told my mother they would not have work during the winter for women, and during the spring. So they ordered my mother to go to the county hou – hun – county place, which was about 25 or maybe 30 miles away, into **Kokpekti**, which is like **Hackensack** here, or whatever, and – to find a job. They allowed her to take my younger brother, but they kept my brother – older brother and myself as the kind of security that my mother will not run away.

Q: Well, this is something that I wanted to ask now. When you were in this place, I don't hear anything about guards, I don't hear anything about jailers, or any kind of authorities, or any –

A: Is a – they called it free prison. You could not leave that place. For example, the post office was in the next village, bigger **kolkhoz**.

Q: Yeah.

A: To go there, if we wou – at the beginning were getting some letters or packages from **Lvov**, because the rush – the – **Germany** did not start yet the war. And we had something, they would let us know that there is a letter waiting. And to go for it, my mother had to walk several miles, or get some – some kind Cossack would take him – her on the truck – on the truck, on the cart, and take her to that – or sometimes she was – she had to ask the permission, written. And I even have here some –

Q: Of her letter – of her permission list –

A: She wrote on the piece – on the – with the pencil –

Q: Right.

A: – written you – I can still read it, there's a kind of permission that my mother can go to the village to – to the post office, and come back.

Q: Okay.

A: And one day my mother was so afraid because the **predsedatel**, that's pres – political president of what was Russian, and ultra, ultra-communist ga – was away, and my mother couldn't get the permit to go out. And so she went without a permit,

and she was coming back, carrying a package which was I don't know how many, maybe 10 pounds or something. Was very tired, but she was more afraid than – than tired, but – because if they catch her, and they would take her to prison, what will happen to us? And she said, she had lived it, several miles that she had to walk, with such trepidation –

Q: Yeah.

A: – that she might be caught, and that she somehow let us down, that she would be taken to prison. But fortunately, something like that did not happen.

Q: But the fear was in her, the price was in her.

A: Yeah, you can imagine, because –

Q: Yeah.

A: – she knew like – and y-you know, the – the places outside this town, the roads were probably cart driven roads, and not the regular highways or whatever.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was all empty steppes. You could go by train, and s – hours and days, and it was all empty. So somehow you didn't – even if you tried to move somewhere, where would you go?

Q: Yeah.

A: So my mother was sent to that town, and she st – that was sometime toward the beginning of winter, so probably they took us from this place where this old woman gave us a piece of – to stay with – corner of the – of her up – house, and put us in an empty house that didn't have window, had only paper on the –

Q: Yeah.

A: – wall, and the – it was so cold, we didn't have any burning things by then. In the winter we couldn't go behind the house –

Q: Of course.

A: – and get anything to heat. So we slept in our coats.

Q: Yeah.

A: And in the morning, the water that we kept to wash down, was all solid ice. But they – then my mother started – got the job as a janitor in some children's home **[indecipherable]** hou-house, and –

Q: An orphanage.

A: Orphanage, or also the – sometimes they took the children probably from – from streets, or something. Anyway, she got the job, she was writing to this, let me have my children. And this **predsedatel** said no, we have too few horses, and they're needed here to shove the snow, or whatever, work a little bit in farm, and I can – we'll – well, no. No, no, no, until late March. And there was something else that

happened, that somehow it was almost, you know, for the normal situation in life, difficult to understand or feel, or react to. We had the **[indecipherable]** among these women who stayed first, who came, there were two women: one was with the small child, the other was with – alone, a fairly well-educated. She was, I think, a nurse, or some advanced, super nurse. And she had a lo – she was lucky to get a lot of jewelry. And she was also getting the jewelry from this woman and the other one would hire the Cossacks with the cart, to take them to a distant cit – town. Not city, a town, where they had so-called **zwartaz**(ph) **kupka**(ph).

Q: What's that?

A: Selling the gold that the government wanted. So they would take the things, and then you could buy – they had cans of food. So I know my mother gave her wedding ring, and some – bracelet, I think. And that was all, she didn't have much on her. But anyway, these women, after several months, not working – not going like my mother was going to work at the farm – were accused by this **predsedatel** that they were parasite **[indecipherable]**

Q: That they were speculeg – speculating.

A: Speculating, and they are not working. In **Russia**, if you don't work, you don't eat. That's the Russian. **[speaks Russian]**

Q: **[Speaks Russian]**

A: Yeah, and so they were arrested, they were parasite, because they were living – oh, first they sold their things, and then they would buy from some –

Q: Right.

A: – women who had something, like my mother gave her ring, and they would go and bring some food, or maybe – I don't remember if we got an – what we got for that wedding ring, but anyway, these women were arrested while my – and were kept in the prison in that town where my mother was now, with my younger brother. And the Polish people who lived around there learned that there is going to be a judgment on them, they were going to be sentenced for whatever. And my mother tells me the story because they were watching this thing carefully. The women were given seven years of hard labor in gulag, each. And they came out of the courtroom, and there stood this **predsedatel**, so thinking, you know, here I am a hero, defending the Soviet society from these parasites. Here you – you have proof that I was right. And somebody asked in Russian, asked these women, what do you think about now, about the **predsedatel**, the situation and the **predsedatel**? She said well, God is not speedy, but he is just. And this man, you know, did – before, he was laughing at us when he saw a praying book, or some people praying or something, singing a religious song, he was laughing that there is no God, and all this kind of thing what the – he was taught. And so he returned home. Two weeks,

or maybe three weeks, this is past hard winter, it's already now into spring, but it's still winter, it might be February, or so. He – his child gets the measles. His beloved older son, 10 years old or something, eight or 10 years old. And the measles doesn't come to forward, but open, you know, breaks out inside the system, and the child dies. And this man turns himself into completely different man. He remembers what this person said, that God is not really speedy in punishing, or whatever, but he is just. And he looked at it as God's warning, or something, and he started going to the Poles to ask about God, who is God, what do you believe, and something. And then one day, in the evening, toward the end of March, he came to us, that's room with already was little bit warmer, but still – we were still not quite **[indecipherable]**

Q: You were cold, yeah.

A: – right. He said, gather up whatever you have, and I'll come at night and take my horse and take you to your mother. And he drove me and my brother, with all the belongings that was with us, by night, to **Kokpekti**, to that city where my mother was working.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: And this was on – on – you – you – you could not explain. In the normal circumstances you don't have it. But this was something like – like the, you know –

Q: It's almost like a –

A: – protection.

Q: It's almost like a biblical tale.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: Y-Y-You cannot assume, but we had – my mother always prayed, we had, every evening before, we had always knelt down and said our prayers, and my mother was – she was not, I would say devote – devout, but she was religious enough, and she had the hope that God will not let us down. Which I think now, talking about the hope, I think the hope is the most important thing. Love is not only the thing that keeps you alive, hope is the thing that keeps you alive. Because you hope tomorrow will be better, tomorrow will be better. Can't be any worse, tomorrow will be better. Love sometimes could not save you, but hope could save you because you went through very difficult moments, you were hungry, and maybe tomorrow somebody will give you a piece bread. I would go babysitting sometimes, to the Cossacks families. The child was in a small – I don't know how you call it, it was almost like a – like a basket near the roof. The baby was there, and if the baby cried, you pulled the string, and he dropped a little bit **[indecipherable]** stop. The parents were there having friends eating, and having their corner, laughing, or whatever, in Cossack's la-language. But then afterwards, when I was going home, I would get a piece of

bread, or actually a – sometimes it was in the Russian families, the Russians had bread. But the Cossacks had kind of like pita bread, because they had baked them. And they would give me one, and I would come home, wouldn't eat there, come, divide it into four pieces, and then like, the animals who are hungry – if you see the animals who are hungry, each one takes a piece of big things, and goes to a small corner and eats by himself. And this is such an intuitive feeling, that we did the same thing. To take a small, one quarter of this piece, and go, and by crumbs eating, prolonging it, and eating. And it was somehow so neither – you know, the nature of – of –

Q: Of people.

A: Right.

Q: How – how did things progress? Somehow now, have you – in what you're describing, has more than a year gone by –

A: Yes.

Q: – has it been a year and a half? How long were you in this place?

A: In **Kokpekti**?

Q: Yeah.

A: We were there – this is March would – we came. The spring –

Q: March 1941?

A: March 1941.

Q: Okay.

A: And then there is – my mother worked at that place, and I think there was sometimes some Russian food that you could get, I think. And still, the exchange of things, or services, like we were – my brother and myself considered ourselves professional shepherds. So we – because this was a town, it was not the farm, but many of the women had the cows, one cow in some side of the houses or something. And we went around and if they had the calf, we said, we will set a small herd of cows, and we will go into the steppes – because it doesn't belong to anybody, we could do it, and take it – but somehow we did – it fell through, but anyway, my brother was taken by – he was then 12 years old, and he was taken by the – some Russian people who were building the train things to – to go and be – you know, go-getter, or some – how do you call it? Help out with the small duties –

Q: A gopher. A gopher.

A: A – a gopher for – for these people, so he would go for a week, or sometimes longer. And wa – the – the younger brother stayed with us, and my mother – my mother was working. I-I – it – it seemed also a lot of – there were other Polish, many more Polish families, so we sometimes would gather a-and, you know, had evenings like telling stories, or singing together, or sometimes gathering together.

But otherwise I don't remember. I didn't work there. The only good thing was also very unusual thing, some stri – sort of difficult to pr – assume that it happens. When we were going from door to door, about our ad – possibilities of being hired, and we s – entered some very elegant buildings by there – of – there were office buildings and elegant people were walking, then we were – in a sense, we could walk wherever we wanted. We were not, you know, watched out, that you couldn't go there, or couldn't go there, just walk. And we knocked, thinking that we would find somebody. As it happened, a door opened, very elegant, intelligent man – what happened, engineer, who was working on these trains, or some other big jobs, and he's one of the head persons. And he couldn't give us a calf to **[indecipherable]**

Q: Right.

A: – but he started asking us – first of all, the Russians, of course, did not know about these people, you know, we were looked at no – you know how in – in **Russia** you don't ask questions, first of all. So if they drop a group of people, so the Cossacks don't si – first of all, don't speak Russian, and they don't know much about the outside world. They don't know about the war, they don't know what happened. So he started asking how come you found yourself here? You are Polish, and started asking us question. He gave us some candy, and he said – he send us, later on, send us some bread or something, to my mother. And for months

afterward, from time to time – and for example, there were some passing engineers, through the town. So he would send them to my mother so she could make a cof – tea, or set – tea was the only thing that we – brick tea. You – I don't know whether you would realize. It was a pressed tea by bricks, and it was more –

Q: Concentrated?

A: It's a concentrated –

Q: Yeah.

A: – leaves, pressed together like hard leave. And they were very valued, especially by Cossacks.

Q: Okay.

A: They would take a small –

Q: Piece.

A: – break an small, put in the water. And take it – after they drink water, they put it in the next one because it was so tight. Anyway, a – so when he would send us something, he – somebody who was passing by, to ask for tea, to ask my mother to make tea, also giving a chance that maybe we have something that can sell. I remember my moth – my father's attaché –

Q: Case.

A: – case, my mother sold to one of these people.

Q: Engineers, yeah.

A: And I don't know whether it was some money, but there were some shops, although they had the shops, once a months, the sugar would come. Once a month, salt would come. And the restaurant was always surrounded by the local people. If they killed a camel, or, you know, th-they didn't have really killing the cows, because that was not th-the – in that city, I don't know what actually was trading, in that sense.

Q: Right.

A: But you couldn't get, sometimes, to that restaurant, or – the woman who had – one of these two woman that had the gold, that was selling, she was sending her son to beg when Russians were eating. So he would go around and beg for – for food. We – I know that we didn't – my brother and – and I did not feel like doing it, but that I remember, that that was the only way to get some food. And so this man was helping us, from time to time sending some o – fish, or something like – like that. And always asking us to come and tell him how we are. My mother was, at one point very sick. She had heart problem, and she had kidney problem, whatever. And the doctor told us that she cannot drink too much water, because of the heart, to have not too much water for – so the lungs would not fill with water. But then we would get this chaff of wheat from somebody for doing something for that woman,

or selling something small. I really – sometimes the packages yet – packages are still coming. They would send us rice, they would send us fat, the –

Q: Lard.

A: – lard. Which was very much appreciated by Russians. Cossacks –

Q: Not so much.

A: – they're Mohammedans.

Q: Yeah.

A: They would not look at it. But you could sell these things that came. And that, somehow, from day to day we, still hoping that it will be – then – and then – then it – one day, at the beginning of June, I remember the sun that was settling in the evening. I stood outside with some women – Russians, around. And they looked at sun, who was a red color, and she said, it's bloody. It was blood. The war is coming. The war – they had some feeling about some kind of –

Q: Disaster, yeah.

A: – saying that it is – when the sun is like blood – looks – there is a war coming. This is beginning of 1941 –

Q: June.

A: – June. The 22nd June, the Russians are attacked by Germans.

Q: Did your lives change?

A: Not at the beginning. We didn't know what was going on. We were, you know, behind all the clouds and everything, we didn't know. We didn't get any letters, and – letters stopped, the packages stopped. But also, no – no radios, nothing. But as – as things started to progress, we learned, toward the end of – of summer, I think it was sometimes late August or September, that there was a kind of a conference with Russians and – and Poles, and English people. English offered to help **Russia** to fight **Hitler**, but on the condition that the Poles who were allies of **England** had to go free. So they gave an amnesty. Not all of them followed this. The prison guards didn't read, or didn't – didn't – or – many people stayed there for years afterward. But some of them stayed, and there was an idea with **Sikorski**, who was the president –

Q: Right.

A: – of – of **Poland**, prime minister of **Poland**, together with General **Anders**, who was then also in prison, but he was let out. He was in prison in **Lubyanka** in **Moscow**. He was first – he was hev – badly wounded, but he survived, and he became by – **Sikorski** ordered him to form the Polish army. At first it was thought to go with the Red Army, and the Russians, with some diplomatic talks, started talking and there – by then, the war is really going bad for Russians, because

Moscow – people – government, Russian government goes to **Kuybyshev** because **Moscow** is –

Q: Right. Is being und – attacked.

A: – is surrounded.

Q: Yeah.

A: And all the thing, and then **Stalingrad** starts. So at that time, **Hitler** is a lit – not **Hitler**, **Stalin** is a little bit pressed to the wall, and he agrees to allow Poles to form the government. There were couple of depos, where they put near **Kuybyshev** the **[indecipherable]** and **Otwock** or something like that, where the Poles started coming. They allowed **[indecipherable]** somewhere bet – during the – into the prisons, into some towns where there was some more connection, in between, some people passed the information. And we are still in **Kokpekti** in the – and we were allowed to go somewhere where it's not so cold in the winter. So we don't have to ask any permission if we want to go, but it still took some time, that by about November that year, we're – this man, this engineer said, I will lend you my truck, to take you to the station, and then you can go south, wherever that – you know –

Q: Right.

A: – settle somewhere. Because we were not at age that – my brothers were too young to go, my mother wasn't – would not be a soldier –

Q: Sure.

A: – whatever.

Q: But you were allowed to be free.

A: But we went to let – to go and maybe look for better living conditions, so – and this man lend us a car – the truck –

Q: Yeah.

A: – to take us to **[indecipherable]** for nothing. Didn't charge us for anything. And we waited for the trains. In **Russia** the trains means the train – you know, the cattle train, open or like wagons, that we were coming in. So when the trains like, would come, you would sit in the train, there is only one track going south, so it goes anywhere, track, and then my mother, being bourgeois brought – she went to buy tickets. He had – he gave us some money to buy tickets, so my mother paid to **Alma-Ata**. And as you know, **Alma-Ata**, when we came to **Alma-Ata**, they would not let us get off the station, because they said this is – this is a showplace of **Kazakhstan**. **Alma-Ata** means apple – father of the apples –

Q: Okay.

A: – or something like that. And it is a – a beautiful **middle-terranean** climate, like in **Greece**, or like in **Italy**. And we thought, you know, we will still carry our life, whatever it is, but in that place they wouldn't let us in. So my mother said, how

much wa – are the tickets, I have to buy tickets. I – I cannot get on the train without the tickets. So she had 80 rubles left, so how far this would allow, and that would take us to **Jambul**, which is a big city down –

Q: South.

A: – in – south. It's an industrial city, and it's antique city, it was one on the road, silk road, and all that. Anyway, we went – we got back on the train, went also on the train, took us. In **Jambul** we stayed out, we were put out on then, and you couldn't get into the city in a sense, to walk around, unless you had to prove that you have work in the city, and a place to live. If you have to look for work, the first question is, do you live here? If you don't live, you couldn't – you couldn't get the hou – it's a –

Q: It's a – it's a – it's a closed circle.

A: Right. So my mother was very upset. At one point she got a – how you call it – how you call th – the Russian **banya**(ph), you know, a –

Q: Mm-hm, oh, a bath.

A: Bath. She had the room – one – one couple said, why have **banya**(ph) and we don't take with my wife, we don't take the bath, it's outside, you know. So there is room – but there is room only for you and the two boys. And I was living – there were already several Poles around, and they were somehow – some contacts were

among the Poles, that they, I don't know, by luck would get in somebody that we knew before, from the northern part.

Q: Can we interrupt just for a second? I think you need – **[technical break]** Okay, so you're in **Jambul**, right?

A: We have – on the station in **Jambul**.

Q: Yeah.

A: And my mother finds that **banya**(ph), the ba-bathhouse, not –

Q: So, a sauna? A kind of like a sauna?

A: A sauna –

Q: Yeah.

A: – outside, with the pile of stones.

Q: How do you say it in Polish?

A: **Banya**(ph).

Q: Oh, **banya**(ph).

A: That's local, because we don't have it.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, when the Russians came to **Lvov**, we didn't have the lice-ing places, so we were not cultural enough, considered by – by the Russians. **Banya**(ph) is typically Russian or Scandinavian, but actually more Russian, you have the small

building like a garage, a stone, big stones, and in the middle it's a heavy pot that you put water, and you fire the – under the stones, and the stones become so hot, and the water boils, and the steam –

Q: Steam, yeah.

A: And you had sometimes they use the kind of sticks –

Q: To beat you, yeah.

A: – to beat you. And anyway, I didn't have the pla – place for me, and I was – for a couple of weeks. So my mother had the chance to – had a chance to put a foot in **Jambul**. But then after a few weeks, or – I think it was few weeks or two months or something, his family was coming in, and he said he will be using **banya**(ph), and so out you go. And my mother was walking – it's another story of unusual things. My mother was walking on the street, and she seemed like some – some woman was passing her, a beautiful, fairly young wom – I think she must have been in her early 30s or something. And she comes to my mother, said, what is the matter, you look so – like something very bad happened. And said she now lost the place here, so she can't go and look for job, and she doesn't know where to go. They would not let my mother stay – us to stay –

Q: Right.

A: – in **Jambul**. And my mother said she's a – she will be looking for the apartment, and she's – but I don't know where to start. So she said, come to me tomorrow here. And she lived not too far from that place where **banya**(ph) was, on that street. It's a – it's a big city, but it's not quite paved yet, the dirt is on the street, and especially in the rainy days, you go up to half legs that sank in the mud. But anyway, she showed where she lived, and who – and actually, she invited my mother to come and have cup of tea with her, and tell her the story. She said, come to me tomorrow. And my mother came – went to the station where we are sa – lying on our pieces of luggage, whatever it was, and she said, tomorrow I am going to – she said she will look for – among her friends, maybe somebody has something to offer. And as it happened, she said yes, here, go to that place, and my mother knew a little bit of Russian, so she could converse. And it appeared that this was some kind of aristocr – aristocratic Tartar woman, who herself was very anti-Soviet, because Tartars were –

Q: Right.

A: – during the first World War, all this –

Q: Displaced.

A: – w-were not only displaced, the Tartar, the Cossacks lost their gover – their place, this was taken over by the **Soviet Union**.

Q: Right.

A: And her husband committed suicide, or was killed, so she – because he were – he didn't want to join the party, communist party. So she had a thing to settle with the communists. And so she told that story. Anyway, next day my mother comes, and she said go tomorrow, go to this woman on that street, on that street, and she will – she has an apartment room, because this was all the question, in **Russia** you don't see apartments, you see room.

Q: Right.

A: And so she says, go there, I settled with her that you would be coming on this time tomorrow. And my mother went next day, but the woman said, I want three months' rent, you know, for that room. And my mother said, I don't have any money. So, she said, well, you cannot – I cannot rent it to you. So my mother comes back to our Tartar friend, and she said, well, I will look for something else, come tomorrow.

Q: So another day again.

A: So another day. My mother comes another day, and she said, go to this woman, maybe she ha – she **[indecipherable]**. My mother goes there, and she said oh welcome, come on – come on in. Your friend paid for the three months' rent. Can

you imagine? Another kind of a touch. How not to believe in – in some kind of superior force.

Q: Being – yeah.

A: – hanging over you. Anyway, so we moved in to that place, we made friends with this woman, sometimes had – she had us for tea, sometimes she – she came over to our room. We sometimes helped her with some other Poles who couldn't find places, so we **subletted** a piece of the room. And that is 1941 – or 40 – no –

Q: Forty-two.

A: This is '42. This is November we left **Kokpekti**, we came in the winter, which in **Jambul** was a muddy –

Q: Yes.

A: – rainy winter. And then my mother found a job in homework, making the quilts. There are several woman who put the frames –

Q: Okay.

A: – and work on it. And then they sell – not sell, give it to the factory that gives the material.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, so my mother had the right to stay in **Jambul**, and had the place to stay in **Jambul**. Then we learned that this army that was Polish army made of prisoners and –

Q: Right.

A: – ex-prisoners and people who came close, because the Russians would not give them tents. Only in the winter they were at the regular tents without any heating, and any clothing and the food, suppo – there were a hundred thousand people, practically – not – not hundred thousand, but at least – they gave the food only for 40,000 people, so the people were –

Q: Hungry.

A: – really starving there.

Q: Yeah.

A: So the Russian suggested, you go south, and **Sikorski**, and – and ish – and **Sikorski** and the Russian – not the Russian, English forces, suggested that you go southern part of **Russia**, and then get out into the **Middle East** under the British jurisdiction. So that happened, and these people went there. We still did not have the right of it, and I did not know where is my father, because only the families of the military people who were going there, had the chance to go as families of the people or – in – in the army. And every day then, from – I started working, I had to

work, because I was then 15 in January, although my December date doesn't count, I am 16 from the first of January, even though the whole month I'm not yet 16. I had to work in the **butink –** you know what **butinki** are, the –

Q: The – these are –

A: – pressed –

Q: Yeah.

A: – pressed shoes from wool – pressed wool –

Q: Yes.

A: – that you roll. I was in factory of this, so cleaning the wool cut off the sheep, and then separated, they would take it in another room to wash it, and then they would take it on the combs, and sewing and all that kind of thing. That was not part of my job, my job was only this, except that it was full of this prickly –

Q: Yeah, hurts your fingers.

A: – things, right. So my hands were always in pain, because it's all dirty, prickly wool, straight from the lambs. But anyway, I worked, and at one point th-the – it went bankrupt. Can you imagine in **Russia**, it goes bankrupt? How'd – it's – the money in **Russia** goes from one pocket to another pocket. It's not that some owns it – somebody owns it –

Q: That's right.

A: – some – probably some – some people made some bad things, and they kicked him out, and so the factory –

Q: Closed.

A: – folded. But then, this is now coming to the summer, and the more and more we – people were passing by, and some of the trains, the cattle trains full of the prisoners are passing by, and because **Jambul** was quite a big station, and also the war is going on, so the trucks are needed for soldiers, so these trains are staying, sometimes for a few days, and I would go and look for my father among the thousands of people who are passing, and asking – and some people said, oh yes, I knew him. So somehow I would give them something to eat I brought myself. You know, these people were hungry.

Q: Hungry.

A: And you know, they – whatever you call – their cloth was in pieces. They sem – they themselves were, you know, like the remnants of human beings, after two and a half –

Q: And this was **Anders's** army?

A: Hm?

Q: These were prisoners, or **Anders's** army?

A: This is the prisoners from gulags who were let out –

Q: To become.

A: – to go, to join to the army.

Q: Got it. Got it.

A: So they're still prisoners actually, but free, going to join **Yangiyo'l** which is near **Tashkent**, near **Samarkand**, where the Polish forces were forming, before they were to go to **Persia** and **Iraq**. **Persia**, it's **Iran**.

Q: Right.

A: At that time, shah was still there. And anyway, this is still – I cannot predict what will happen, but I'm looking for my father so he can go and join the army –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and put us on the list as his relative, so we can come also, to get out of –

Q: Sure.

A: And I – I remember couple – couple of – there is toward the end of some on – or beginning of August. And they are talking about end of August, army is going to go over the **Caspian** Sea, too. And I – I'm very upset, not finding my father, and passing by – by the passengers train station on the – on one of the **[indecipherable]** of the sides, there stays a group of Polish uniformed officers. And I pass by, not to ask them anything, but just – just to – maybe something, you know, I don't know –

Q: You will hear something.

A: I will hear something. And so, it just happened that one is introducing another one. This is **Capitan Organish**(ph) **Koppage**(ph), this is true, **Organish**(ph) **Koppage**(ph), he is the officer in charge of the list of civilians who go – goes now to **Yangiyo'l**, and in few days the list will be closed, because toward the end of August, the people are starting to leave the **– Russia**. All the army is going out. When I – my heart sunk. By now, I didn't find my father. I came home very sad looking, and my mother somehow gained my tale of what happened. And she said **Organish**(ph) **Koppage**(ph)? Did he look like that? And she describes me this man, because I looked very closely at him. Was round face, he had red blonde hair, cut very short. And he had the eyeglasses, but the ones that hold by the nose.

Q: Mm-hm, pince-nez, mm-hm.

A: And reddish face, you know, kind of – they call it in – in Polish the piggy – like – like pig has the color of the hair, and almost like albino type of thing. And my mother, yes this ca – this is **Capitan Koppage**(ph), who was a friend of your father, but you were very small when he was transferred to another town or city, or whatever, in his duties, so you can't remember him. But he liked you very much, he would hum and – and my mother sat down and wrote several letters to **Yangiyo'l**.

Q: Okay.

A: And fortunately for the post office, it reached him a couple of hours before closing the list, and they put us as – my mother as his sister, and we got on the list.

Q: Oh my God. Oh my God.

A: This is – this is one of those unusual things that, you know, my mother is on the list now. But next transport is from **Ugovoy**(ph), which is about 180 kilometers before **Jambul**, so we have to go back on the train, or however we could get to jam –

Q: This place.

A: – to – to that place with the trains that have the transport of these people to go out. From that train, go to cor – **Caspian** Sea, to **Krasnovodsk**, and you get on this – with all the transport, th-the people are on the list, can get it. The thing wa – which was also difficult for us to – to do, it – not only that we didn't have money to pay for any kind of transport, but the city of **Jambul** was put – Poles in the city of **Jambul** were put under martial law – not martial law, arrested, so to speak. We could not leave **Jambul** legally because there was some – some difficulties with the police **delegatura**.

Q: Okay.

A: **Delegatura** was, you – you understand, the office of the Polish government, and the emb-embassy in – in **Kuybyshev**, in – and **London** representative. They did

something, they had black market, they were getting the transport of goods from rush – from **America**: people were sending clothing, and –

Q: Yes.

A: – for this – for the – this big center. **Jambul** was really an – almost a – a big center where they would bring some things. And I understand that some of the people –

Q: Yeah.

A: – la – different people, all nations have those people that they would somehow sold some of the things on the black market. So the Poles were non –

Q: Persona non grata.

A: Right. So how we can get out? My mother remembered that we had a painting of one of our Polish friend. She was the wife of the judge in **Poland**, oh, he was a lawyer before the war, and high, high up. And he was called to **Kuybyshev** to go to **Russia** quickly, almost like day to day, to go to be in the government on – on – on the **[indecipherable]** or something. And she didn't have a time to give a painting of the portrait – she was herself a painter – to the owner of a store. And my mother said, I am sure she – that store has a truck. Maybe I'll give – she wakes up one day, and she – she wakes up, and she said, I have it in my – I remembered that I have this painting. I will go there, and maybe she will allow us to take this truck, and

somehow we will go back to **Ugovoy**(ph). We are dressing up, and there is a knock on the door. And there is a man who was the cobbler, or shoe – shoemaker, with a big Polish – a Polish man with a big family, and he said, I have a truck for your disposal – except that, you know, the – 500 rubles per person. At this time already, my older brother, the younger than me, but older brother, went to cadet school already to **Ugovoy**(ph) and was already on the way down to the camps near ba – to get out of **Russia – Kazakhs – [indecipherable] Kazakhstan** actually too **[indecipherable]** I believe. Anyway, so three of us. And my mother said, I don't have any money. Five hundred rubles is quite a lot for me – even one ruble, whatever. And he says – he said, what do I need rubles for? You have been always kind to me, you send me some Polish friends that I could have worked, and I gained; you children played with my children; and you never showed me, you know, the – the difference that I am a cobbler, and you are a lady. Or something like that, something of that sort. You can even dispose whom else of your friend could go, we – I had couple, and we sat on that truck. But how to get out of **Jambul**? He, this cobbler, had a friend, a Polish Jewish friend, one of those who willingly went to – to **Russia**, who had some **NKVD** friend too. And he said that he will put on his friend coat as **NKVD** man taking people to the collective farms, because this is

harvest time. So all people on the – in the city will very often volunteered, or not really, forced to go to the –

Q: But they were – yeah, as volunteers.

A: Right.

Q: Yes.

A: And th – so, I'm taking people to the farms. So he went around at night. We were supposed to speak only Russian so in case we passed some places where they could recognize. And we got there on time, two days before the train from **Ogovoy**(ph) was go-going south. And this **Organish**(ph) **Koppage**(ph), that Captain **Organish**(ph) **Koppage**(ph) was there, and we were helpful in getting three people: the doctor from **Kokpekti**, what I told you my mother was sick, then he –

Q: Yeah.

A: – he only told my mother, you sickness with the legs and kidneys wa – is only good to go back to **Poland** to – through **Skaviets**(ph), which is the kind of –

Q: A resor – a sort of a sanitorium?

A: A resort for the – right.

Q: Yeah.

A: But anyway, he – I think he was old bachelor, you know, old widower. Anyway, he was alone. He was Pole of Jewish faith. The rule was set for Poles to take only

the Polish Christians because according to Russian – I don't know whether it's Constitution or whatever, they – the Jews are not Polish citizen, they are now Russian citizens, and they cannot leave. So we somehow hid him on transport, we knew Pole – Polish, and we – in that train. And it was at this time, this was passenger train. So we could sit on the steps of the entrance of the – into the wagon, and sometimes if, at the station, the **NKVD** was coming, or some soldiers were coming, we would tell very – this is another family, m-mother and father who my mother knew for man-many years previously, from **Kraków**. They haven't seen each other, but somehow found themselves at the station in **Jambul –**

Q: In **Ugovoy**(ph).

A: Right, **uga – Ugovoy**(ph). And we also told her. So with that girl, very nice, brown curly hair, beautif – beautiful girl, we were sitting at tho – and we'd say sometimes, my mother has the papers, my mother is there, or something like that. So they knew, they would hide these people, and so we transported these people, smuggled them out.

Q: How many did you smuggle out? The doctor –

A: The doctor and the – the father, mother and **Aldonna**(ph) was the name of the – **Aldonna**(ph) is a famous Lithuanian name. So she was with us, we later on met in **Teheran**, but that's much later.

Q: And were they all Jewish?

A: Hm?

Q: These were all Jewish people?

A: They were Jewish. But they were assimilated Polish Jews.

Q: Right, right, okay.

A: You – you don't – you didn't –

Q: You didn't distinguish, yeah.

A: – ask even, something, you know, in –

Q: Yeah.

A: But anyway, they were supposed to be on – forbidden to leave **Soviet Union**, and couldn't get on the list. So since **Capitan Koppage**(ph) was there, they had us wrote the list, he put them on. And – but it was still not quite proper, so to make sure that –

Q: Right.

A: – the Russians would not demand the – the papers or some – some kind of checking up. But anyway, we are going from **Ugovoy**(ph) through **Jambul**, back going south. Since there – you have to think about that **Ugovoy**(ph), the trains were sent few days before. And some people had little children whom they left in –

Q: In **Jambul**?

A: – in **Jambul**, to come to the station of **Jambul**, and get on the train, because they will keep the tr – place for them on the train, going together.

Q: Right.

A: Some had the old parents, who couldn't make it 180 kilometers.

Q: Right.

A: So, they also waited. We are slowly arriving in **Jambul**. Train stops, so slows down. We come, and are faced with the closed gates, and closed bars, from the people who are trying to get on the – on the station. And they closed our – all our doors, so nobody can get out from our train. And they tell us, these people cannot go. And you can imagine I k – I will never forget to my dying day, the hands, the – the crying, the screams of the people, through the iron post stretching the arms to the parents who are on the train going away. Or the children of the people who are supposed to get on the train, and i-it's a – it's a horror story in that sense. For two hours we stayed, they would not let open one – for one person, our door or the railings for the –

Q: There.

A: – people. And I – and train starts, and you can hear one big cry of all these voices. I still have my hair stand at the back of my neck, because you – I – I will never forget that scene. The train goes and goes and the people cry and slowly train

goes faster and faster and the crying is – continues on the train, but we already don't hear that crying on this train. And this was one of the most horrific scenes that I remember from all that kind of travel. So after several days, because they're quite a distance from **Jambul** to – from **Ugovoy**(ph) and **Jambul** to **Krasnovodsk**, we came to **Krasnovodsk**, they let us on the beaches, and we had to walk to the port, which was actually at – also trade ports, when they have the oil barrack -- barracks all – ship, on which we had to – they didn't have hume – cells or rooms or anything, they had – we had to be on top. We got – there were still some people who came, knowing that **Krasnovodsk** is the place from which Poles will be traveling. Some people traveled by hook or by crook all the way to **Krasnovodsk**, but they still did not let some of these people –

Q: Join.

A: – because this were different people, this is a two, three days travel.

Q: That's right.

A: Tam – they s – the others stayed.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they couldn't find our name on the list, and somebody, some man picked up my – I had the small bundle, which contained a pot. You had to have always pot, because the **kipiatok** is always given on the station, and that's the only way you can

make tea, or soup or whatever. So this was – and my **Krakowian**(ph) kind of a dress, which I, when I wore it, when seven years old, but you couldn't sell that to the Soviet or Cossacks. So anyway, I still had it with me. And I didn't have much clothing, I think I had one dress, and in that was a – whether I had dress on, or I had the blouse, and a skirt, this was my own things, and probably toothpaste, or whatever, I don't know whether there was even toothpaste. These things I – kind of vanished from my memory. And the – finally they found our name. This man says, well, I'll go up – because these people were very busy – and he took advantage of them being busy – took my small thing, and said, I'll find a place for you, keep it for your mother and your brother. And he really did that, after they found our places, and we come, and we see him sleeping on the row of big ropes that go for – on the – on the big boats, like they have ropes. Unfortunately, we are not leaving for some time. We were supposed to leave in the evening, and this is now night, and the **NKVD** is full, walking around the people, taking all the documents, and all the – trying to – most of – but it was, you know, people were so, like pressed like sardines. Anyway, at one point, they come to this man who took my things. It happened to be one of those free going to paradise persons, who were communist, who wanted – and after two years he learned what's the paradise, and he wanted to get out of **Russia**. But he didn't exist on any lists of Polish officers or anything. So

they took him, they took 13 people who were trying to get out of **Russia** without document, proper documents. **[phone ringing]** And anyway, we got on the train. Took us two day, and th-the – over to **Paklevy**(ph). **[interruption]**

Q: Okay. Okay, so you just left **Russia** and then ta –

A: We were on that boat.

Q: Yeah.

A: And we reached **Paklevy**(ph), which is a port in – on the Iranian, or Persian side, and they set us in a camp on the beach, with the – you know, they gave us the blanket, and there were sticks, four sticks, and covered the blanket as a roof, and they put – they gave us some – another blanket or so, to lie down on it and wait until we have to g – to be de-liced, and disinfected to go to the next place. They took all, or whatever clothing we had on, they burned that, or cleaned them. It all depends – I – I don't know how – how you – they looked, or whatever. And then you go to another – that took a couple of weeks. By then my mother was very sick with dysentery. Because, what happened was that dieticians did not work on those – at the camps. For the hungry people who have not seen any good food for two, three, four years, you don't give the lamb soup, with the hot fat on top to the people who are completely devoid of any –

Q: Nutrients, yeah.

A: – kind of nutrition, so they don't have how to digest it. So very often, many of them came down with dysentery, but on – my mother didn't tell me that she always when – what relieved her, she would go to the sea, to the water, and she would sit there, because that relieved her pain. But then they put us on the next – next camp. Then, I don't remember how many weeks it took yet to be there. We met my brother, who was still in another camp, but he was then **[indecipherable]** or young cadet – what later on they called young cadets, because **Anders** was organizing the school for the young boys, to take as many as possible because there were many orphans coming. So anyway, we met with him. He was – he went to **Teheran** earlier. We joined in **Teheran**, but not in the same camp, he was in the army, and we were in civilian camps in **Teheran**. And that's the –

Q: This is a –

A: – end – this is the beginning of September, 1942.

Q: No, it couldn't be '42, was it?

A: Forty-two.

Q: Was it '42?

A: Right, '41, the war started; '41 earlier.

Q: That's right, okay, and so then it takes a while, '42, –

A: Forty-two.

Q: – so you're still in the middle of the war, okay.

A: Middle of the war –

Q: Yeah.

A: – we cannot go anywhere.

Q: Right, okay.

A: And anyway, the – then there are camps, three camps. My mother was taken from the truck, because she had very high temperature, and what had proven, she had typhoid, both – both typhoids; the skin typhoid and stomach typhoid and dysentery. Then later developed – she was really –

Q: Sick.

A: – si – very sick, they took her to the hospital. And I had – that was quite a walk. I waited on the bus that was taking some people to visit people in the hospital. It was – had to go through almost the side of **Teheran** itself. We were – the camps were outside of **Teheran**. In the –

Q: Let's – you know, since we have only 20 minutes of tape –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – let's go to the main events that happened after that. In September '42, you were in the civilian camps in **Iran**. And how long were you in **Iran** in total?

A: In total until '44.

Q: So you were there –

A: Spring ’44.

Q: You spent two years there.

A: Yes, much of it was in the hospital, because after my mother got better –

Q: Yes.

A: – I start – I got couple of the – couple of pneumonias, and with pleurisy and was very sick for a little while. But somehow I survived, but it meant that I spent a lot of time in the hospital, but I started also they – they were organizing the schools, which was sitting on the bricks in some hangar with the ho – old airport, near **Teheran** was unused, so there were hangars, and we were sitting there, and the teacher was giving us lessons. There were no books, of course, but we were writing. There was some probably note papers, and we were learning. Then, in the – in – we were moved to another camp. We were – at first we were so-called second camp, but in the first camp they had much more modern buildings, or some kind of civilization type of thing, and the school started, there were classes, and –

Q: And this was all under the British jurisdiction.

A: Yes. The Poles were running it.

Q: Right, right.

A: It was the – the British organized it, but the – we were in that second camp, and one – once when I was in the hospital – out of the hospital – going out of the hospital, the doctors sent me to the third camp, which was in the mountains. So, because of my pneumonia, I think that they did not realize what I – la – only in am – in **America** la – years later, that I had developed **TB**, but it was not quite progressive, or becoming more, so they didn't recognize it. Anyway, so many sick people ho – you know, small things like this did not really come to notice. And so I was, for a few months le – summer months, when there was a scouting jubil – jamboree at that camp, with the beautiful trees, and somehow a lot of young people from all different camps, and – and afterwards I came back to – to the camp, and then we were taken to **Akwaz**(ph), which is going south. **Akwaz**(ph) is the –

Q: Still in **Iran**?

A: Still in **Iran**. The hottest place on earth, so they say. Anyway, it's in the desert, but the buildings are, you know, the regular buildings, cement, or whatever. And they put us in big, like war – not warehouses, you couldn't call it some – some maybe – old shops that they didn't have anything to sell, but the –

Q: Right.

A: – open places. And there we were for about, oh, that would happen that we came, I think, to the end – end of '43, into the spring –

Q: Of ’44.

A: In ’43.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: In April, they started closing the camps. The – because the Russians were afraid of so many Poles living clo – so close by to **Russia**, urged –

Q: The British.

A: – the British to take the Polish refugees out of there, and the pole – they organized the camps all over their commonwealth. Some of them were in **India**, some of them were in **Africa –** many were in **Africa**.

Q: What about you? What happened with you?

A: When – we were supposed to go to **India**. My – my brother first came back to us, but shortly afterward decided to go to the high school, which would be cadet school in **Palestine**. So he was supposed to go there, he still stayed in – in **Teheran**, but we were put on the boat in **Basra**, which is no name now.

Q: Yeah.

A: And were to go to **India**. Unfortunately, the Japanese submarines were looking out for the British navy, who was the whole group of boats were going, the navy b – navy ships were going, and we were among them, the only passenger and refugee, about thousand people or so. And they were attacking in submarines, so we hid in

Aden, just close to the **Mapiss**(ph), you know, the Arabian peninsula, and then on the other side is the port **Adem – Aden**, who is the – was a British kind of a center of defense or whatever. So we stayed off the port, but in – away from these Japanese things. And after a few days we let out, still intent to go to **India**, to **Karachi**, where they had camps, **Karachi** and – in in – **India** at that time –

Q: Was part of **Pakista – Pakistan** was part of **India**.

A: Later on.

Q: Yeah.

A: But still it was **India**.

Q: Okay.

A: And they had some – already some camps, people in the camps, but we still ha – met with the Japanese submarines, so they started – told – the order was to go down eastern side of **Africa**, to go to **Mombasa**.

Q: Okay.

A: And in **Mombasa** they said, now, all our camps are full.

Q: Okay.

A: You have to go to another one.

Q: Oh my.

A: They send the boat to **Zanzibar**, which is a lan – island near **Mombasa**. **Zanzibar** didn't have any facilities to keep refugees. So they told us, you have to go to **Beira**. **Beira** is a capital of **Mozambique**. **Mozambique** was the colony, Portuguese colony. And **Mozambique** is just across from **Madagascar**. You had to get into that narrow passage to go to **Beira**. Just before we got close, there was a huge storm that took our ship. By then we were alone, the other ships went their way. And our ship was thrown more into the middle of ocean, above other side of **Madagascar**. By the time we turned, it was no use going back to **Beira** because going back, I don't know, with the – they were not sure whether they would accept us. We finally stopped at **Durbin**, which is South American port, sou –

Q: South African port.

A: – ra – African, sou – **Republic of Africa**. They were neutral in the war. Actually, there was a lot of pro-**Hitler** thoughts of wars, you know –

Q: Right.

A: – if you know the history of wars in South African Republic. But they let us off, put us on the train and took us to **Rhodesia**, southern **Rhodesia**, which is now zambas –

Q: **Zimbabwe**.

A: **Zimbabwe**. Nearby – near ba – **Salisbury** was – was capital of southern **Rhodesia**, now is – what is now – I forgot, this moment. The capital is differently named. And from there there was – they formed – there was a school for girls, formed also by the government, from a private plantation, it had beautiful home, beautiful things for the girls; and that was a school for girls. So th – from the camp, we went – I went first, then later on my mother – my mother was a teacher at the school, but then they asked my mother to come to the school to be guardian of the – mother guardian of some of the girl – of some classes, and then also to teach gymnastics. So she came, and that is ’43. Let’s see, four –

Q: I thought you lived from ’42 to for –

A: – end – end of April –

Q: Uh-huh.

A: – the end of April, 1943.

Q: I thought you were for two years in **Iran**?

A: Yes, in four – ’42 –

Q: To ’44.

A: – to ’44. Forty-four beginning. By the time the boat was traveling for six weeks –

Q: Then your – April ’44, you are in **Zimbabwe**.

A: In – right, at the – in the May, or something like that.

Q: Okay, okay, so –

A: And then we come to **Rhodesia**, and we come to the camp.

Q: Five minutes, okay. So we have five more minutes on the – on the tape, so we have to –

A: So the war is still going on –

Q: Going on.

A: – in **Poland**.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay, right.

A: Okay?

Q: No, we can still talk, if you are willing, we are still talk –

A: Well, it just –

Q: Yeah.

A: – because just to close it in some spot –

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: – like you say. The – the war made it impossible for us to think of any return yet, because the war was still going on. And my brother, who went to this cadet school,

he was in **Palestine** cadet school, and then, in 1947, actually at the beginning – at the end of ‘46, the Polish communist government, which you know by enou – enough of this, that that was imposed on by Soviets, wanted Poles to come back. But because of history, not many people felt safe to go in back, unless they had some close relatives or children or parents they wanted to help out. But otherwise, it wasn’t quite wise to go.

Q: Hang on a second. Let’s stop. We are will – **[break]**

End of File Two

Interview with Maria Pawulska Rasiej
May 8, 2013

Beginning File Three

Q: So you were in **Africa** in total, for four years.

A: We are – first we come to **Marandella's**(ph), a camp for all refugees. They take the girls who are of high school –

Q: Age.

A: – level, to come to that school in **Giglifolt**(ph), which was this plantation –

Q: Yes.

A: – left by the – some English people who lost the son to some viper's bite, and so they left the plantation, went back to **England**, and they donated the plantation. And it was given to the government, and they place the high school for the girls there. We took care of gardens, we took care of –

Q: Okay.

A: – sleeping quarters. Well, the main building was used in the school and administration, but then we were in some barracks, all around.

Q: And did you stay there for the entire four years that you were in **Africa**?

A: N-No, we were at – in **Giglifolt**(ph) I was for three years –

Q: Okay.

A: – not quite, no. First I was for two years, then we met with my – not knowing that my uncle, my mother's brother was in **Lusaka** in northern **Rhodesia** as one of

administrators from the British thing, because he knew several languages, and he knew English, and he was also legal – some knowledge of law, or whatever. And he was as a contact with the Poles – Polish forces. Anyway, my mother asked to be transferred to –

Q: There.

A: – **Lusaka**.

Q: Okay.

A: We went to **Lusaka**. I finished one school year in **Lusaka** with the first lyceum, and th – for the second lyceum I went back to **Giglifolt**(ph) in southern **Rhodesia**, but my mother and my brother –

Q: Stayed.

A: – younger, stayed in **Lusaka**. And then, after I graduated with **matura**(ph), or **[indecipherable]**, to you know, gained the document of – proof of my ending high school, then I went to **Lusaka**. We stayed – that was in 1947, and we stayed til 1948, when they were closing **Lusaka**. Some people were taken from the camp of **Lusaka** to another camps, and we chose to go to – to e – to **England**, because my brother was in **England**. We thought w – we somehow got – by mistake, too, because his name was the same like our cousin's name who is captain. And he said, **Tadeusz Pawulski**, well, let him come. But then afterwards they said, well, he is

cadet, he cannot come, but we were already on the boat to **England**. So we arrived in **England** in 1948, in – if I remember correctly, June or July, in – in the western **Gloucestershire**, where there was a big **[indecipherable]** divide Poles. Most Poles came there, and from there they were sent to different camps. And afterwards, I – we learned that some of our relatives who were in **London**, and invited us to come to **London**, my – I found my mother a job as – because she didn't know English very well at that time anyway. She was the – how you call it – the person who washes the **[indecipherable]** in – caretaker of the apartment houses where they have – she –

Q: Okay. A housekeeper.

A: Not necessarily a housekeeper, the one who is the concierge.

Q: Ah, got it, okay.

A: Concierge. And I was given a – a cou – work at one of my uncle's packages to **Poland** office, to write some addresses on the things, on the – and to be able to live, because my mother, by her – **[break]**

Q: All right, so after – when di – where were you when the war ended? Do you remember?

A: We were in **Africa**.

Q: Were you in **Rhodesia**?

A: We were in **Rhodesia**.

Q: Do you remember the day?

A: No.

Q: Do you remember hearing about it?

A: We – by then we had newspapers, and we were living in the open society, so to speak, the teachers and –

Q: Right.

A: So we knew, and we also knew that the soldiers who were, as you probably know the – there were so many Polish soldiers in the west, in – fighting with the – on the side of the allies, were coming to **England** after, choosing not to go back to **Poland**. And so that – the end for them came, and most – many of them went to **England**.

Q: How did your family – how did your mother res – react, how did your brother – how did your brothers react? How did – when you found out the war is over, what were your first thoughts, if you can remember.

A: I only – what I can say, the – we were always planning to go back to **Poland**. Situation was that **Lvov** was under **Ukraine**.

Q: Yeah.

A: There was no **Lvov** for us. Eastern part of **Poland**, the big chunk of po – **Poland**, now was –

Q: Part of **Ukraine**.

A: – given to **Stalin**.

Q: Yes.

A: And also, my mother contacts – was happy and was lucky to get some contacts in **Poland** with the relatives. And the brother of my father, who lived in **Warsaw**, what I told you, about that I visited, he wrote to my mother, watch out, because your sons have finished high school, and when – if you come back now to **Poland**, they take all the children of intelligentsia, so to speak, because by then –

Q: That's right.

A: – **Poland's** intelligentsia was practically all gone – to the Russian – **Russia**, first to the schools for officers, for the army officers, and my mother said, I am not – we just got out of **Russia**, I am not –

Q: Letting my –

A: – willing to go and lose my sons once they go to **Russia** with the no – we know the situation –

Q: Yeah.

A: – what will happen, what might happen.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so we went to **England**, decided that we will go to **England**. And since many of our friends were in the army, many of our – some of our relatives were already – some of them did not go the same route that we went. Some of them during the 1939, happened to be outside of **Poland**. When **Poland** was attacked they went to **France**, or they went to **England**. And they **–**

Q: And they could help you then, coming in.

A: – had – they were somehow suggesting that we go to – go to **England** and wait there.

Q: Did you have –

A: There was always the hope y – **[indecipherable]** was there, so there was always yet the – and based on any – anything special, it's still – that it can't be that **Poland** will be cut in half and given away, and that **Lvov** will never be Polish. And so because of that, we stayed in **England** to be close enough to the continent, to **Poland**.

Q: Did – by that point, did you have any hope that your father was still alive?

A: No, we didn't. No, I didn't. We knew that the prisoners of war were killed, but where they were buried, we didn't know.

Q: And you knew by whom they were killed?

A: We knew that wa – from the – we didn't have any doubts.

Q: Okay.

A: Because the letters stopped in April –

Q: That's right.

A: – 1940. There were still no Germans in – in **Russia**.

Q: Right.

A: So the Germans could not have killed them. In anything there were so many witnesses, and –

Q: When it all started, you were a 12 year old girl?

A: Right.

Q: And when it ended, you were already in your upper teens?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Almost a young woman.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: So you could say that your – your teenage years –

A: Well, vanished.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: And that is somehow unrecover –

Q: Unrecoverable.

A: Unrecoverable.

Q: Did you feel that loss?

A: Yes.

Q: How? In what ways?

A: In – not in the bad ways, in something – becoming more serious person. The not having the common language with the average English girls of my age, and even some of the Polish girls who were younger, or older, the different – different ways they – trouble they found themselves in **England**. And –

Q: Were you lonely?

A: – but also strong. Stronger.

Q: Yeah. You felt stronger.

A: Stronger as a human being, I think.

Q: And how? Why did you feel stronger, because you had lived through so much, and you survived it?

A: Maybe in – in the fact of these thoughts, and I was, shall we say, more on the serious sides, and I wanted to study, I wanted to finish university courses, or something, by the – way I went to the **London** University dean of history, and he assured me I had the Polish papers translated, no-no – not – **[indecipherable]**

Q: What kind of certi –

A: Notified. Translated –

Q: Notarized certificate?

A: Notarized. And on basis of that, I wa – I had a place, but I couldn't get the scholarship, because even though it was given by the Polish government in **London**, had the money, but as the young woman who was giving me an interview, when I asked for the scholarship to go, what do you need university for? The – the girls who go to universities go for – to find the husbands. We can – we don't have money to spend on such material. I can give you only the scholarship for some business administration, two years' course. So I started college. But the – the thinking was the women, without realizing that actually, the woman who is educated is really the mother of future people.

Q: That's right.

A: Fathers are outside, earning the life, but the mothers teach the children. **[coughs]** Excuse me. But that was about – so I started college.

Q: With a business administration –

A: For business administration, but I didn't finish, because by – I got married in – during – after one year, I met my husband. There were some Polish women who organized evenings for the young people, because there were many soldiers who returned from the army, and other places, went into college, and were a-alone

sometimes. And there were no really places that you would meet, as normal – in normal life, and so they organized, among their friends, to have socials. And on – I was invited to one of the socials by a friend of my mother's, and – and a friend of her mother's. And when the – and met my husband, although I remember him coming into the room full of people. I remember his coming. And the song from the "**South Pacific**," one – the evening – we remember the – one enchanted evening, you will see a strangers across the – and I see – the same thing happened. I saw my husband, and I saw his eyes, and somehow I – I saw him. He didn't see me, of course, because there's a group of people, 30 people or 40 people around. But then I had the mistake learned – mistaken idea that he came with a lady who brought her son to that party, as a young man to – for having, you know, a chance to meet. And she came also with a young woman, who was telling to this young woman's mother, and – mother, which I assumed that she must be daughter-in-law, because she turns mother-in-law, so he is married. So, out. No more intention of getting to know closer. And I – somehow we had supper quite well done by all the ladies' mothers and all that. And after, there was some dance – dancing in the living room, and I used – my braids I put on – in the crown of the head. And in one – he approached me – my husband approached me to ask for the dance. And when there was some

kind of the changing of guard, when I had to go under his arm, or something like that – you know, the steps sometimes, his –

Q: Cuff?

A: – button – cuff – o-on – on the cuff, caught my hair. And there is a saying that you somehow get connected with – there is this – with your hair gets into some – your button gets into the hair of somebody, that there is something, that you become friends, or –

Q: A connection is established.

A: Connection established. So he looked at me and let me s – let me see the person that I am to – to know.

Q: Yeah.

A: But then I still rem – think he's married. So I discourage him. He – I would sit here, and he would come and sit nearby, and I would make excuse and go to another place. And then I was looking through my pocketbook, and there was some picture – tickets from the **Albert Hall** in **London**, that I went to the concert, and he would tell me, oh, he wished that he knew me by then, he would have accompany me. And I said, well, it passed, and I would move to another place again. And then it's time to go home, and this lady with her daughter – by then I know that he is – he is a

friend of the son of this woman, who doesn't like to go to any dances, so he chose his friend to –

Q: Come with him.

A: – replace him.

Q: Ah, okay.

A: So he was not the married type, but he said he will help the – to go the –

Q: Right.

A: – through the underground, to the next station, where the other people would go, the Mrs. **Topalitska**(ph) and her daughter, and her – the friend of her son. But then he got – I got to change the underground trains, he went – changed with me. He said, I'll take you all the way. And then took the bus who was number 28, all the way to **Kilburn**, northern part of **London**. And I – he would go there and got the address where I am, because I didn't want him –

Q: To know.

A: – to know where – the address of – so wrote down his street number and forced me to give the – I did not have telephone at that time. The – the person downstairs who lived, he had the public telephone nearby, so he would pick up the telephone and call me sometimes. So he didn't know, I didn't give him the telephone, I gave him the address, and he – and he – the thing was – another small coincidence; bus

number 28 ends at **Kilburn**, at north, but ends at the quite the southern part of **London** when he lived – where he lived close by. So he took the same, the last bus that took me there, coming back was going to last route, all the way to the place where –

Q: He lived.

A: So it – somehow it just.

Q: That – that button in the hair did it.

A: Oh yes.

Q: So, when did you get married, and when did you come to the **United States**?

A: We married about – I – I was still going to school, to the college, studying. And then, in the spring, he was one of the soldiers – **America** gave 125, I believe, visas to the – at the end of the war, when the people went out of the army, and did not choose to go to **Poland**, or go to another country to settle, **America** offered the permanent visa, a permanent settlement in **America**. And that was the spring – yes, not even – we got married in August, that's six – eight months after we met. We met in December – this was around Christmastime, the party was. And the – in -- we got married, and then, I think it was some oct – October or November, when the letter from the American embassy came to my husband, that you are on the list of these people who are offered to settle. Will you choose to take up – to pick up the –

and go to live in **America**? By that time, I – he was married, so he tried to get me on the – you know, on the list. But then, Americans at that time were very strict about letting people come into **America**, so no sick person could go, n-no some political –

Q: Sure.

A: – things. And they called me three times for the medical tests. I di – I was very surprised – we were very surprised, not knowing why. By the time – by this time, I think I was expecting a baby – not yet. Well, anyway, we sa – finally got the ala – the permission for me to participate. He and his mother, who was in the army too –

Q: Okay.

A: – who was in – in **Russia** with him, and he was in the cadet school, as I told you –

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: – in the **Persia**, and to **Iraq**, and to the **Palestine**. But he – he and his mother went – were going – she was in the army too, so she went, as – entitled to it, and I was put on the list, and we went to the **United States**. But because it was ending, the program, we were too late to be paid the – the – because they – they – they gave the tickets for nothing, to a certain degree, who wouldn't – who said he's going to.

Q: Right.

A: We were too late for it, so my future mother-in-law – all then, not future, mother-in-law, had some friends who lend us her – some money, who paid the – some ticket transportation, and came in the boat.

Q: Did you land here in **New York**?

A: In the – February, '52. 1952.

Q: In February 1952.

A: Late February.

Q: Did you ever go back to **Lvov**?

A: I visited **Lvov** couple of times. It was still – there was definitely – **Poland** was by then free, there were changes. In 90 – 1996 was the year they had the – my elementary school, had the 180th anniversary, and they somehow invited some people who were at the school. And my brother, who lives in eng – one of them lives in **England**, in **England** they were much more connected, they knew more of the things and he told us that there is a chance to go to – to **Lvov**, as part of the –

Q: Right.

A: – group –

Q: Right.

A: – for that occasion. So '96 –

Q: Is when you went.

A: – was my – with my brothers, who were also started the school – lower grade –

Q: Yeah.

A: – but started the school, and when one from then **Texas**, and my oth – the older brother lives in **Texas** now **[indecipherable]** but he went – came here, and we went together to – to –

Q: **Lvov**.

A: – **Poland**.

Q: Yeah. You have shared today a really – an amazing story. As I said earlier, it would be very hard to believe that all of these things happened to one person, and that, you know, for – it starts with a 12 year old girl who has a normal life up until that point, and between age 12 and age 19, goes through so many different – I mean, hell and back. What would you want – what would you want younger generations to understand about all of this? About these experiences? What do you think you'd want to pass on to them?

A: That's a very difficult question. You have to stick to your ethics, to what you learned as a – whether it was only in school, or it was only in religion, or also only from watching your parents, watching the people – I – I consider myself lucky that even in **Africa** in the high school, we had extremely good people, honorable people,

who were thinking along the lines that I was thinking, not **carpe diem** type of thing –

Q: Yeah.

A: – not lightly look at – at life. Be of some use to humanity. Be a – a person who has lived, but gave something of herself to the – to return for good, that somehow I received from time to time, throughout these difficult times. And also, I wo – maybe I always wanted something more serious, even if – I remember in small – in the small grades they – that I wasn't a flighty, stupid, young girl, who just from one ice cream would go to a stupid movie although my parents would know where I could go, or where I shouldn't go. But anyway, I think that life is much more serious than just to catch up, or a false fame by something –

Q: When you were in **London**, right befo – before you met your husband, and you said you didn't find any common language sometimes, and I wanted to ask you: did you feel lonely? I mean, you had gone through such experi – **[loud noise] [technical difficulties] [break]** I guess I wanted to wrap up the interview with, what your final thoughts would be, and what you were able to maintain, and how you felt you had changed, if you had changed. What final words would you want to leave with people?

A: As I mentioned, and you suggested that actually I didn't have childhood; I was still standing mentally to a certain degree, or psychologically, a 12 year old girl who had to sometimes face more difficult things, working to – to get something to eat –

Q: Yeah.

A: – or to help my mother to help us. That made me much more aware of seriousness of life. And when I came to **England**, to – so to speak to normal life, and went to **London**, and lived in **London**, met some other people, I still was not hungry for light – kind of young teenagers like nowadays you see –

Q: Yeah.

A: – an – around, whether on television, or you met during that –

Q: Sure.

A: – stay in a – in **England**. I wanted to study. I was very close to my mother, and somehow they si – some of the girls that I worked at the cook's office, that I said I worked after the second job in **London**, that I don't know how you live like that; you are so close to your mother; whether you will be able to get married, because you won't cut yourself off that closeness. But I – I think that was maybe this – and maybe something of a **un-conscience** way of holding to something that holds me to pre-war times, that holds me to my father, in a sense, to the time when I was –

Q: Well you had –

A: – somehow –

Q: Yeah.

A: – more serious looking at life, and also when – in the high school, I remember that I developed that feeling that the teachers and the chairman of our – director of our high school said, which was according to what I was thinking and what my father taught me, that by your behavior, you are ambassador of your country. And I never stopped loving **Poland**, and always thinking that maybe some ter – something might happen, like the things that you did not plan happened, that you will go back. And th – I will never got rid of my hope that – a-and longing for **Lvov**. And I visited **Lvov**, then afterwards I visited twice or three times later. **Lvov** was very neglected, and you could see the – kind of Ukrainians trying to cut all the traces to **Polandism**, and I could not find the names of the street that I knew, because first of all they were changed, but they were changed in the Ukrainian alphabet. So I didn't ever learn that Ukrainian, so – but I still had a feeling that I was walking on my traces – tracing my steps, when I was going to school. I visited – my school was taken by – over by Ukrainian high school, but the – next to it was the – the boys' school before the war, which now they united the girls' school and boys' school, Polish, one of two schools in **Lvov**, which is Polish, and Polish teachers, very high level of learning, and when Ukrainians are sending –

Q: Their children there.

A: – children there, because they have the chance then to go to **Poland**, to the universities. More – it's easier for them because **Lvov** University ha – is overflowing by the people from the villages, or from –

Q: Of course.

A: – other parts of **Russia** or **Ukraine**.

Q: Yeah.

A: But this thing and – and the sense of value and sense of feeling responsible, that whatever you do, it somehow influences the lot of many people that –

Q: That you have an effect.

A: It has the effect, or somehow if people would talk to each other. My – my son, the oldest son, when there was some boys who, as I told you, being of – having foreign name here in – in **America** too, that – that they – sometimes he was the victim of a bullying, and so to speak, and when they – they came to our house, and through – through the window, the bags – baggies full of water. So they attacked my br – my son, and he wanted to go out and start fighting. And I said no, you have to learn somehow to deal with this in the way to explain the anger of somebody for no reason at all; and to tolerate – not really tolerate, but to understand that prejudice, you don't fight with the same fighting spirit, but you try to look to the

future that the future will be more peaceful, and more people talking to each other, or sa – something on that –

Q: Yeah. That you don't – you don't answer in the same way that you are being attacked.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: You don't lower yourself to the same level, if somebody unreasonably attacks you –

Q: Yeah.

A: – for whatever reason. You only lower yourself as a human being, responding the same way.

Q: Well, Mrs. **Maria**, thank you. Thank you very much, for sharing so much.

A: You're welcome, and thank you very much for your understanding, and your – the questions that you put, trying to, somehow, to understand how I tick, so to speak, right?

Q: Well, I – I – there are no words, because I have never gone through such a thing, and all I can say is what you have done today is given us a real gift –

A: Thank you.

Q: And we thank you for it. And this concludes the **United States Memorial**

Museum interview with Mrs. **Maria –**

A: **Pawulska**.

Q: **Pawulska**.

A: **Rasiej**.

Q: **Rasiej**, on May 8th, 2013. That's it.

End of File Three

Conclusion of Interview