United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Jolanta Pawlikowski
January 21, 2015
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PREFACE

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JOLANTA PAWLIKOWSKI
January 21, 2015

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mrs. **Jolanta M**. **Zurczak Pawlikowski**, on January 21st, 2015, in **Arlington Heights**, **Illinois**. And thank you very much, Mrs. **Pawlikowski**, it's been a long day. We've just had an interview with your husband, and I very much appreciate that you have allowed us, and decided to share part of your story with us as well. Thank you. So I'll start the way we did before. Please tell me what was your name at birth.

Answer: **Jolanta Maria Zurczak**.

Q: **Zurczak**. And where were you born?

A: I was born in **Święciechowa Powiat Leszno Województwo Poznańskie**. That means I belonged to the **Poznań** territory.

Q: And what was the date of your birth?

A: August 23rd, 1938.

Q: Okay. So you were a baby when World War wa – World War II broke out?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. August 23rd, did you say?

A: Yes, ma'am.

Q: So you're also – your birthday is the ma – is the date of the **Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**.

A: Unfortunately.

Q: Yes. So tell me a little bit. Were you born in a village, in a town? Describe a little bit about the place where you were born.

A: My parents said I was born in a small town. They were teaching in surrounding areas of **Święciechowa** and **Leszno**, and I lived there until the war broke out. So –

Q: Did you have brothers and sisters?

A: I have two brothers and a cousin, whom I call my first brother, because his mother, who is my aunt, my mother's sister, died of tuberculosis in 19 – beginning of 1942. But I was raised with him. He is, I think, almost a year older than I am, and we were brought up together by my mother and my grandmother.

Q: Was – were your brothers older than you? Your –

A: No, I'm the oldest one.

Q: You're the oldest one?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: One brother was born in 1940 in February, and the youngest one was born in July of 1946.

Q: Okay. Tell me a little bit about your parents. Who was your father, what was his name? The same for your mother.

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A: My father **Jusef**(ph) **Henry Zurczak** was a teacher. He became an administrator, a masters' schoolteacher, and he was also a violinist.

Q: And your mother?

A: And my mother was a teacher majoring in mathematics and physics.

Q: Quite unusual for a woman.

A: Well, she had difficulties –

Q: Did she?

A: – with math when she started at, I think, the teachers' sem – seminary in **Leszno**. And she got help. **[indecipherable]** f – from another teacher, someone who wanted to help her, saw that she was bright, but she was rather not too well. And it helped that she became one of the best students when she graduated five years later, so – and she loved math, so –

Q: That's an inspiring –

A: Yes.

Q: – that's an inspiring story, yeah. And when you – so if your parents were both teachers, were they very active in the community of students, and – and school activities, and – and things like that? Were they –

A: Yes, they were. Besides, both of my parents were scoutmasters. Actually, my mother was a scoutmaster of the youngest group, and she had only boys. She

didn't have – like girls very much. But my fa – and my – my father became a – a scout when he returned to **Poland** in 1920 or '22. I don't remember –

Q: Did your father fight in the first World War?

A: No. Both of my parents were born outside of **Poland**. My father was born in **Garnisonkirche**, and then they moved to **Dortmund**, upper part of **Germany**, and my mother was born in **Helma**(ph) **Wiesbaden** –

Q: So their –

A: – the northwest part of **Germany**.

Q: Did you have German family, or German roots?

A: No, because during the partition of **Poland**, that part of **Poland** was part of **Prussia**. So they were taken – my grandparents were taken out of **Poland** to work, and my grandmother, my mother's parents were taken to **Wiesbaden** because my grandfather was a forester and they needed someone to work there. And both he and my grand – my grandmother worked together. She took the administration under her hands, apparently that's where my mother got these mathematical – i-it – influence. And my father took care of the – the forestry, the cutting and the taking care of and so forth.

Q: So they must have been bilingual.

A: Yes.

Q: They must have spoken German as well as Polish.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And –

A: Except that my grandfather, my maternal grandfather came from a family that, before the first World War, and I think it was at the middle of 19th century, they met – my **[indecipherable]** through **Turkey** from **Macedonia**, and through the – through the **Carpathian** mountains, came to **Silesia**, **Shlunsk**, and then – and – but my mo – my grandmother was from **Vierkapolska**(ph), the up **[indecipherable] Poland**. So somehow they – the families arranged it. He was dark, tall, my grandmother was blue eyed with very light blonde hair, and also tall. So –

Q: And on your father's side of the family, how did – how did they end up, it was **Garnisonkirchen**(ph) –

A: **Garnisonkirche**, yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: My grandfather was a cobbler. He designed shoes and he was a very good cobbler because not only the Polish army, but later on the German army ordered the officers' high boots to be –

Q: From him?

A: – from him. They brought the materials and two soldiers always watched the staircase, and sat there. He worked sometimes 12 - 20 hours, in order to finish.

Q: And this was during the second World War?

A: During the second World War, but during the first World War, he was in **Garnisonkirche**. He – I don't know if he had interest, or he wanted to – not to abandon the – the – the Polish immigrants that were taken to – ba – by the Prussians to **Germany**. He received a permission to teach them religion. They gave him only the first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, written in old Polish. And for one hour on Sunday, he taught them the language, based on the Bible.

Q: Isn't that interesting.

A: Ah, but also he worked in the underground, because he was working with the Polish workers, and they wanted to – they were fighting for their own rights, in order to receive proper payment, and to be properly treated.

Q: And this is in **Garnisonkirche**?

A: And this is in **Garnisonkirche**, but somehow I think somebody –

Q: Informed on him?

A: – informed on him, and he was told that the best part would be if he left – moved northwest, so he – they went to north **Dortmund**. And from there on he promised himself that he will not return to **Poland** until **Poland** had a government.

The government was established in 1922, so I believe that it took them almost two years to travel back.

Q: Amazing.

A: Yes.

Q: It's not such a long distance.

A: No.

Q: So clearly these are stories you must have heard growing up, from either your parents or your grandparents. Is that so?

A: Oh yes, **Jaja**(ph) would always t-tell me – my father's father was also named **Jusef**(ph), and he would – I loved stories. Apparently I was the only girl at that time. I had 11 cousins, including my brothers and my cousin and I was the only girl in that age. I had cousins, girls, but they were older, much older than I was, about 10 - 12 years old. But –

Q: Well, that makes you quite special.

A: But I played with them, and when they were quarreling, they always said, okay, we have to have a general. Who is going to be the general? They pointed at me because I was the only girl. Would I quarrel with anybody?

Q: Yeah. So, tell me a – a little bit about what happened to your family on September 1st, 1939, when **Germany** attacked **Poland**. You were a baby, so –

A: Yes, I was a baby, but my mother told me. My father was in the army. He was already out of **Poland**, he was actually in the – on the border, **Poland – Poland** and **Germany**, past river **Oder**, because we lived between **Warta** and **Oder**. And my mother told me that September 1st, 1931, we became one of the first Reich – the Third Reich of **Germany**, the **Germany** –

Q: The **[indecipherable]** 1939.

A: – nine – yes, 1939, we became the Third Reich.

Q: So it was very quick, very quick.

A: Yes, because it was about 30 – 30 or 40 kilometers past **Oder** to the town of **Kościan**, that – it was not very far.

Q: Yeah.

A: They just walked in and marched to **Poznań**.

Q: And what happened to her and you and – what happened after that?

A: My mother – my father was in the army, called in August that he should come for to serve in the reserves, but then – well, he was a second lieutenant, being a teacher and a musician. So, he had the right to be called **frontow**(ph), right away.

Q: Yeah.

A: And Mother tried to move closer to her mother, who lived in **Kościan**, which was northwest of **Poznań**, and about 30 kilometers northwest of – of **Leszno**. And

we were right – few kilometers south. But she told me that she moved from town to town, zigzagging back and forth until she reached **Kościan**, because it was – she was already pregnant with my brother **Andrew**. But she reached **Kościan** and lived with my mother and her ailing sister.

Q: That is with your grandmother.

A: Yes, with my grandmother, mm-hm.

Q: And what happened with your father?

A: My father was caught in an ambush in – in the forest behind – around **Oder**, and that part of the regiment was practically annihilated. He was shot, was wounded. Those that were caught, which were about 10 – he said about 10, maybe 15 people, but no more, cause some of them were very wounded, but were alive. They took them, but he passed out apparently, and after two days, the German patrol was walking with dogs, and they stopped where he was lying, and the dogs know if somebody is gone or alive. And when they searched him they saw my father's army registration ca-card, a teacher's card, and that he was born in **Germany**, so they took him for one of his – one of their own.

Q: So he wasn't –

A: They took him to **Germany**, they took him to a German hospital, and he, after a month, he came, he was well enough to speak, and he was interrogated. And my

father said, I am not a German, I am a Pole. I was taken – I was born in **Germany** because my parents were taken there. This was during the part o – Prussian partition. So –

Q: And so what happened to –

A: – then he was – when he came through, they – because my father, being an officer, he was taken to **Murnau**, which is **Bavaria**, to a **[indecipherable]** camp. That camp was a camp that was dedicated or – or protected by **Himmel**(ph). And it was a camp to show off how the Germans treat Polish officers.

Q: So it was sort of like a show camp.

A: Yes. When there was no visitation, they would treat it like any other – well, somebody – a prisoner. And, I mean, they had to scrape food. My father liked to cook, and everybody knew this, so he sometimes actually – I said – he said, I talked at the wrong time and was sent back to the –

Q: The kitchen?

A: – kitchen, yes, the ki – the kitchen. And he said there, at least, I could s – I could scrape off the – the peeling – peeling the potatoes, I could as – I could scrape the – th-the peels and – and save it and then cook it behind the barrack, or underneath the bed, or – or so what – or whatever. So –

Q: So in other words, it was a show camp only sometimes.

A: Oh yes. They had an orchestra, he played in a co – a symphony. There was a theater, there were – they had lectures, because there were quite – many professors. Polish officers and intelligentsia were sent there. So – and he stayed there til the end of the war.

Q: Oh my.

A: When an American general was passing by, he opened – my father was right on guard at that time by the – by the gates. He opened, and he – that's where my father learned some English, cause they wanted to show off that you could take English, you could take French, other – to improve yourself, to show off that you – that – that the Germans were treating them properly.

Q: And so that's why he could practice his English

A: Yes, yes. And when he said, open the door, my father said, that was the first command of a different voice asking. I didn't know what to do. But he said open the door, and he showed them what to do. So the other fellow who was with him, they opened the gates, and he went through, all around. And said, you, where is your family, do you have a family? And – and he said, my wife and children are in – in **Nordhorn**, in northern part – northeastern part of – of **Germany**, right next to the **Holland** border. So he said, I'm going to **Munich**, hop in. And one – as my father hopped into the sidecar of the motorcycle, he hurt his leg. By the time they

got to **Munich**, my father was collapsing. He had a cut on his right leg, and he already had poison. So they kept him there. But my father had a letter from my mother, who could write to my dad in **Murnau** only three times a – every year – every quarter, she could. Every four months she could write a letter. And she wrote to him that we are in **Nordhorn**.

Q: So that's in the northwestern part of **Germany**, if it's close to the Dutch border –

A: Border, na – yes –

Q: Yes.

A: – northwestern part of **Germany**, right. Right.

Q: And – and so he's liberated by an American general.

A: By an American general, yes.

Q: But –

A: And he left him there because the – because he – my dad needed –

Q: Medical attention.

A: – med-medical attention, and this was sometimes in beginning of May, and we didn't see him til a month and a half later, when he came to **Lingen**(ph).

Q: So for all intents and purposes, your father was – survived the war, but he was out of the picture –

A: Right.

Q: – as far as your life was concerned.

A: Right.

Q: You – did you remember anything of him in your first years, or is the first time you remember seeing him, is that month and a half later, when he shows up?

A: I didn't – I knew only my father from the photograph that was standing on – on the the table, on the side table at home. And in-in-in the place where my grandmother lived, and when I saw him, as an almost seven year old child, I looked and I said, that is not my father. My father was a handsome man, with a bushy hair. This is a sick man, this is – cause when I saw him in **Lingen**(ph) in 1945 in July, I saw a man bent over, grayish hair and – and his face was grayish, it – he looked like he just came out of a tomb. He could barely walk, he was so weak. So, it was at – that's the first time I heard him, after all these – after six years of not seeing him. Cause I was a year old when he left.

Q: Yeah.

A: When he was gone, and I did not see him before. But we, my mother and I, we stayed in – in **Kościan**. It's through June of 1944.

Q: So you were there for five – five years.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And your – and your first brother was then born –

A: In 1940.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes. He was almost four years old when we were taken out.

Q: Okay. Was your – was your mother able to write to your father? Did she find out, did she know he was in this prisoner of war camp?

A: She found out through his – through his parents, who lived in the same city.

Q: And –

A: My – yes –

Q: Okay.

A: – my – the **Zurczak** family lived **Kościan**.

Q: Okay.

A: And – and my father – my grandfather was the – was the shoemaker.

Q: Ah, so –

A: But – but what happened is that my mother was notified by her father-in-law where **Jusef**(ph) is and that she can only write once every four months to him. And so they – so that they, many times – my mother taught me that she would put her letter with their letter, in order to make certain that it gets there. So my father sa – had some letters when he came in 1944, when he appeared, because he kept

certain letters. But certain letters, I've noticed that it was only my dear, or my beloved, and everything was blacked out.

Q: Really?

A: Only he would – and **[indecipherable]** I'm kissing you **[indecipherable]**. That was all, because whatever he wrote in it, was apparently unacceptable. So somebo – all the letters were read through before they went to the – to the people, on both sides.

Q: Did he know that he had a son?

A: Yes, yes, and he knew –

Q: And so they let information through.

A: Yes, yes, that info – yes.

Q: Okay. And did you see much of your father's parents, as in those first years?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Because we lived – he li – they lived behan – be – further from us, where the town square was, and a pond where beautiful white swans san – swam. And I enjoyed the swans. It was – I always ask my mother, please can I go to the market and buy – she says, but you're only four years old. I said, Mama, I want to go and

see Grandpa, but I want to also see the swans. And I would always have a few crumbs of my bread left for them so I could –

Q: Feed them.

A: – and they would – yes, and feed them.

Q: Yeah.

A: But we – we visited them quite often, as was allowed. We could not visit them during air raids, or when the soldiers were marching, practicing something like that, no.

Q: Was the town full of German soldiers?

A: Yes. We lived right across in a house, only in one room on the third floor – well, I mean, I – European would be second floor. But across the – the palace, which once belonged to my father's great-grandfather.

Q: Oh wow.

A: And well, unfortunately, the **SS** cavalry occupied that. So – so we were very, very watched. And –

Q: You were watched because of that family connection?

A: That I don't know. We were watched because my fa – my father being in **Murdenau**(ph), an officer, and they did not like my mother, who did not look very Polish. My mother was dark skinned, with pitch black hair and dark eyes.

Slim. And she was petite, and they always called her – she had a name, of the black crow, they called her.

Q: The back cr – the black crow.

A: The black crow.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes. And my mother, my brother and I were witnesses. Three times she was called. She rece – received a notice that she has to show up at the wall of the square where many executions took place, and th – the family, her family, that means my grandmother, my cousin and the two of us had to go and witness. And of course, most of the people were there too, witnessing who was being –

Q: Executed?

A: – executed. And they always left my mother til the end. My mother was al – and I remember her, she was always dressed in a black skirt, black shoes, black stockings, a white blouse, and she would walk in, and when they went to put the – close her eyes, put the band on her eyes, she says, I don't need it. And then they would get ready, and the commander would come in and say, not today, black crow.

Q: So this was a mock execution of her?

A: Yes, yes. My – my mother was – when they, of course, was over, the commands were given, the **SS** left, the people were looking around, they said, oh, next time again. Next time again.

Q: And so you –

A: So three times, it was 1943, and 1944 was the last time. I think it was in – right after Easter, which was April.

Q: And you're a five year old child?

A: I was five and a half. I was waiting – September wa – in '44 was going to be my sixth birthday. I mean, not – not September, Au-August 23rd was going to be my next birthday, when I would be six years old. But at the age of four, I knew how to read, how to count, and how to write. And when somebody says, how do you know what kind of a book is this, or what paper this is, I say, in Polish **[speaks Polish]** It had to rhyme, I don't know why, because I – my mother always said, we're going to **Jaja**(ph), or we're going to **Babcia** for their birthday or their **Imieniny**, their name day. And **Jola**, you have to learn how to say another poem. So I had to learn this. And I said, why do you read to me? I know how to read. **Babcia** told me, this is this, this is that, and I – what does a child do when you cannot get out of the house because of the air raids? And even if we wanted to get

out, we could only go up on our street, in front of the house. And watch out because when the alarm struck, everybody had to be inside.

Q: And there were lots of air raids?

A: Oh, rot – lots, lots. Especially – I remember those in ’43, and ’44, quite well.

Q: Well, you know, one of my questions is, what is your earliest memory. But your – whatever your earliest memories would be, they are during wartime.

A: Yes.

Q: Because, if you’re a baby when the war starts –

A: Right.

Q: So, are your earliest memories connected to the war, or are they some –

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes, just – just to the war. I remember that the first memory that I have is when we were totally isolated from the bedroom of my cousins, from his mother, who was dying of tuberculosis. And in that room was a wind – veranda window, glass, that you – you know, there were shades that you could close and open. Why we were there, don’t ask me, I don’t know. Nobody ever told me this.

Q: Okay.

A: Or maybe they told me, but I don't remember. This was 1942, so I was barely four years old. And I was always afraid to go to that room, because there was – one wall was the glass, the opposite wall was composite of doors. And later on I found out that books were on one side, and a wardrobe was on the other side. But somebody took something out of it and left a black strip of a – I don't know, maybe of a – a sash, or something, but it was looking at me. And when that black sash disappeared, I said she died.

Q: And were you right?

A: Yes. Because I told my mother this. And on that night, or day, she died. But I think – I don't remember to be a child. I always had to take care of one boy, and the other on the other hand. My p – my brother **Andrew** was on the right side, and **Izbisznik**(ph) was on the left said. He was older, but he missed his mother.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I think boys are more babies in the – when they're younger, they, I'm not sure a little bit later. Not all, but some do. But most of them do.

Q: But he was alone. He was alone.

A: Yes, he was – he was very much alone, and – and if he didn't get what he wanted, he – his father oh, by the way, his father was a prisoner of war, taken for

labor. He was in **Poland**, then he was taken to **Germany**, and then I heard that he went outside, was he in **Holland**, or was he in denya – **Denmark**, I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: But they were – people were talking. This – this I remember at many times Grandma says, oh, **Franek**(ph) is there again. Or he is moved again. But – but my cousin was very – he was very attached to his mother, and to grandmother. If he didn't like something, he would lay on the floor and have a tantrum. Only my mother could tell him, **Izbiszu**(ph), get up. You're not going to get anything to eat.

Q: So, why – she was targeted – your mother was targeted by the authorities, the Nazi authorities because she was dark, or because she was an officer's wife?

A: No, they just didn't like her, because my mother looked too –

Q: Jewish?

A: Mediterranean. Yes, too Jewish, yes. And lot of people that – remember I said my grandfather, her father was of a Macedonian heritage. So naturally he was dark, black hair and slightly slanted eyes. One of my brothers has that feature. So – and my mother would not step by. But the last time, when she was taken to the execution square, as we called it, something happened. And my mother told me she just – she had enough, because he offended her.

Q: The officer.

A: Yes.

Q: The Gestapo.

A: Th-The – he o – he off – offended her and she just – she's, I couldn't stand it any more, and I spit straight in his face. He took – that I remember, he took his big glove and slapped my mother and she fell on the ground. There were – it was rubble there, and I know that she had a wound someplace on the side of the head, because ther – the blouse was stained, and we were all crying.

Q: So he would really – he ordered all of you children to watch as if –

A: Yes.

Q: – your mother is going to be shot.

A: Mm-hm, yes, yes. My mother refused to sign **aus –** that she was a German.

Q: Oh, she refused to sign that she was an ethnic German.

A: Yes.

Q: **Volksdeutsche**.

A: **Vo-Volksdeutsche**. She refused to do this. She said, I was an **Ausländer** in **Germany**, born there, but I am not German. So what were you doing in **Herna**(ph)? And she never wanted to sign anything else in the formula, that she would have the papers, that she – she was told, if you sign **an Gott glauben**, that means –

Q: To believe in God.

A: – believe in God – in God, not **zhem**(ph) **cat**(ph), that means Roman Catholic, you'll be fine. They'll leave you alone. My mother refused that.

Q: So, in other words, she could si – if she would refuse – if she would accept to sign that she believes in God, but she's not a Roman Catholic –

A: Right.

Q: – that's okay.

A: And if she would sign that she is a –

Q: **Volksdeutsche**.

A: Yes, that she's a **Volksdeutsche**. No. My mother said no, I'd rather die.

Q: And the German officer, do you remember his name?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: No, I don't – not remember. I don't remember.

Q: How did – how did she feed you during those years, cause your father's gone.

A: My mother was given a choice. She could not teach, all the schools were closed.

Q: Yeah.

A: She could either work by regulating the riverbanks. That was very hard work.

Q: Physical work.

A: Physical work. Or work in a ammunition factory, which was organized by the Germans int – in the tobacco factory. Course **Poznań** was known for its production of tobacco.

Q: So it –

A: So she was –

Q: – the tobacco factory had been reorganized into a munitions factory.

A: Right. So she worked in the ammunition. She took – she preferred to take that, because she would not be able to – she was too weak.

Q: Too little.

A: Too little, and I mean, to dig, shovel all that glop outside, and no. So she was paid certain amount of money for that. She – we knew that, you know, you can purchase for 10 **pfennigs**, you can buy a day old, two day old loaf of bread, which was much better, more nutrition – more nutritional than – than a fresh bread, because it tasted fine, you know, much better than the old bread. But it was gone very fast.

Q: Yeah.

A: And many times I was the one that would go. And I remember, I was maybe four and a half or so, and I would go. It was not far away, a street away from the

place where we lived. There was a bakery, and everybody knew me, because I always had a nice bow in my hair up here, cause that's – I said, I am going out. Grandma always put her best dress when she goes to church and when she goes shopping, so I have to be dressed properly, too. So I went there, and the ladies liked me. And that's the only place – if there was no German person, or a young person who was maybe –

Q: From the – right.

A: – from the other side, we could speak Polish. Otherwise it was all in German.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: So in –

A: I didn't realize that I was speaking two different languages. It came to me only later.

Q: So in public life, in – in **Kościan –**

A: **Kościan**.

Q: **Kościan**.

A: **Kościan**. In German it's called **Kosten**.

Q: **Kosten**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: **Kościan**. So in public life there, you could not speak Polish, you had to speak German.

A: Yes.

Q: When you're out on the streets, when you're –

A: Yes.

Q: – you know, in public.

A: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: I didn't realize that.

A: Yes.

Q: I didn't realize that.

A: Besides, there was always somebody walking on the street, a gendarme of this kind or of that kind.

Q: Did **Kościan** have a large German population before the war?

A: There were quite many Germans, yes.

Q: Were there Jews?

A: That I don't know. There were Jews, because my father – my grandfather said that his tailor, he would make shoes for him, he would make –

Q: Clothes for him.

A: – clothes for him, yes, and for his family.

Q: So they would exchange their services.

A: So they – they were – they were ex-exchange. If they left – there must have been, because there were certain – certain shops and my mother went to school with girls who were Jewish, to the teachers' seminary, where she was at le – when she lived in **Kościan**, she would take a train from **Kościan** to **Leszno**, and she said, we never saw any difference, we were all Poles. Because you were born in **Poland**, so you were – okay.

Q: By the time you were walking the streets as a little girl, do you – I mean, let me rephrase that. By the time you were old enough to go out and to this bakery –

A: Yes?

Q: – were there any Jews left in this village?

A: That I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: No, no. Because **Kościan** actually was a town. It was an old town, it had one of known churches called **Fara**(ph), which was because there was a higher – and my grandmother was kept once. She went to church on Sunday, we did not see her for three days.

Q: Why?

A: They were looking for someone who was carrying information papers.

Q: Underground.

A: Und – from the underground. And you know how women – my grandmother liked to go to church on Sunday. Wa – I never knew why, she only told me when she came to the **United States** in 1960, when my mother brought her to live here with us. She said, I always wore my – my original garb. Long skirt, with three underskirts, and I always had a shawl on my shoulders. And only – there were only a few pews in the front, and the rest was just benches, or people stood, or people sat on – on – well, on stones, or on little stools, or something like this. And my mother was not surprised that Grandma didn't come after the evening prayers. But she didn't come in after 10 o'clock. And then somebody knocked on the doors, and that I remember, because that must have been about 40 – end of '44, or 40 f – or – or – no, not – yes, end of '44 or beginning of '45. And said, **Manya**, **Babcia nie przyjdzie**.

Q: What's that mean?

A: Grandma will not come. Where is she? The **Fara**(ph) is closed. And only afterwards, when Grandpa – Grandma came to **America** in 1960, I asked her, I said, could you tell me what happened? You were always so avoiding – you were trying to avoid the – the issue. When I ask, what were you doing? Why wouldn't this woman come in? Because she escaped. How? Well, you know, she knows this

gendarme or that gendarme and she knocked on the door. She felt bad that your mother will worry about her, there are three children here and she has to go to work. And we stayed together with my – I went to pick up the milk in the milk can from the gentleman that was delivering milk on the corner. I would pick that up, and I would go to the bakery with the 20 **pfennigs** or 10 **pfennigs**, whatever my mother left me, and feed th-the – the boys, and – and – and then we would stay inside, we would not go out. She says, you are to not leave the house. Do not open any doors, any windows. Stay in. And then grandmother came in. Apparently there was somebody. She told me. She says, he hid under our skirts. I was always praying that he would – whatever, the policeman didn't stop me, didn't tell me to get up. And he says, my legs were going like this, because what would I do? He was under my skirt at that moment.

Q: So, if I –

A: So –

Q: – understood the si – the story is, is that people were in church.

A: Yes.

Q: Your grandmother was there as – you know, she had ties to the resistance, and this was part of the activity is that she was helping to hide somebody.

A: Yes.

Q: And one of the ladies in the church with her was allowed to leave it because she was friendly with the guards. And –

A: The girl. One of her – th-that she – my – my grandma-mother told me. She says, we just lined up, all of us. And why I don't know, that all of the older women from the rosary society would sit down on that li – in that line.

Q: Yeah.

A: And, all of a sudden, she says, I realized that the eyes were moving like this, between them. While somebody was searching in front, or on the other side, they were going. And she says, and we knew – and then I felt something under my feet.

Q: And it was person.

A: It ma – it was a person. And he was carrying some information –

Q: Underground – okay.

A: – underground paper, yes.

Q: So, i –

A: They didn't find him, so –

Q: Okay.

A: – they opened the doors, and let people out.

Q: But they kept them there for three days.

A: Yes.

Q: And in the meantime, during those three days, this young girl was allowed to leave because she knew one of the guards. And she went to your mother's home and said she's not coming back.

A: Yes –

Q: Okay.

A: – and she went to the other people to – especially –

Q: To let them know.

A: – to let them know that yes, yes.

Q: Okay, okay, now I understand. Now I understand. What a fearful childhood. What a f – you know, just –

A: I didn't think of a f – of being – I was scared only because I did not like to stay when it was very dark, because we could not keep the lights on – besides, lights went off around nine or 10 o'clock.

Q: Mm-hm. So it was rationed. Electricity was rationed.

A: Yes. Everything –

Q: A curfew –

A: – water was rationed, ev – gas was rationed and electricity was rationed. So, when – and my mother would come home, sometimes at two o'clock at night. I mean, two o'clock in the morning.

Q: Yeah.

A: Because they had to work. So –

Q: Did you feel – what was your feeling within the house? Did you feel safe within the house?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yes. Grandma would have – read to us books. I did not see Polish books. She had **Grimms'** stories, **Anderson's** stories, children's stories, all written in German, and she would read to us. Actually she was reading German, and talk – saying – reading it in Polish to us so we would understand. So my – my two brothers would understand what was going on. They said, why these funny names? But you know, it was – but – but I loved stories, I loved when she read, and then she would of course tell us. And when my mother would go to my father's parents, we would – she would not always take us with her. We would sit, and we would say the rosary, or we would sing, and she liked to sing. So, you know –

Q: Did you have any other friends, or was it a really closed world.

A: It was a closed world. I only remembered my – I remember my – one of my cousins, my father's second older sister, **Stanisława**, she had two daughters, and I really – **Mearka**(ph) and what was the other one? I correspond with her. It'll come

back to me. And she cr – **Mearka**(ph) was my friend, and the – and she had an older sister. She was already 16 or so. But they lived – they didn't live in that town, they lived someplace else. So she was the only person that I saw. She didn't come to our house, we always see – saw her in my grandparents' house. But the only time I saw other children would – when we went to my grandmother's – maternal grandmother – to **Rattzot**(ph), which was 70 kilometers away from **Kościan**, and this was going through a large forest. It was cobblestones, those were huge stones, the old – and when I – that – I always loved to go there.

Q: Must have been pretty.

A: Oh, not only this, it's the smell of the forest, the – the vegetation. I-I could pick up the bluebells and – and during summertime pick up the blueberries and – and raspberries, because, you know, it was – this was an original forest, and I could pick up all the – all – oh, anything that I wanted, you know, of di – of – of vegetation. It – it was – I loved to do this. Of course, we were very tired by time we hit the village, but it was fun.

Q: And you – you were free from all of those constraints.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that – that was the only place where I did not hear air raids, cause they were hitting star – tow – towns.

Q: So tell me, when your father is liberated in southern **Germany**, in **Bavaria**, by the American general, he even knows that you and your mother and maybe your brothers too, are near the Dutch border. What happened that you get from **Kościan** on the eastern side of **Germany**, to near the Dutch border on the western side of **Germany**, how did that happen?

A: Because on June sixth of 1944, at two o'clock in the morning, the Gestapo came and told my mother, you have one hour. Take only necessary things, and we will – and we will take you to the train depot in **Kościan**.

Q: And so that meant your mother, or all of you?

A: All of us. He didn't say – he said all of us. And then we waited there, and waited. And in the morning, six o'clock, they told my grandmother that, you are not her family. What is your name? And my grandmother said, **Meeshak**(ph). And your daughter – my daughter is **Zurczak**. You can take **Ratychuk**(ph), your grandson, the younger grandson, and you can go home. She went home, she cooked a bottle of pea soup, and brought it in a can, and this was our only meal that we had until we reached outside of **Poznań**, where were put into a transit camp.

Q: So – so it was you and your brother and your mother.

A: And – and my mother, right, right. And my mother was interrogated there for three days, who she was, why doesn't she want to speak German. She says, I don't speak German. But you were born in **Germany**, you had to learn German when you were in the seminary. She says, but I don't speak German. She spoke – she actually spoke very poorly. She was very surprised that – as much as I could retain. And then after I became well, so I could – when I spoke, she opened her eyes, she says, **Jola**(ph), you speak German? Where did you learn this?

Q: Where did you learn it?

A: I said, I spoke it all the time, Grandma was reading in German. We had – you had to speak in German outside. Well –

Q: So Grandma –

A: – my grandparents spoke German. What do you do?

Q: So your grandmother read to you from the **Grimms'** fairy tales in both languages?

A: Yes.

Q: In Polish and in German.

A: She ti – yes, she wou – she would read it and translate it. Actually, when I finally got hold of – when I was already eight years old, and I knew the grammar of German – but speaking is one thing –

Q: Right.

A: – but knowing the grammar. And I said, I remember this, I remember this, I remem – oh. So she wasn't reading in Polish, she was reading in German. But she knew it so –

Q: Well.

A: – well, that she could retell the story in the oth – in our language.

Q: Okay. All right, so the Gestapo was interrogating your mother and keeping her for three days, and is angry with her because she refuses to a have any connection to anything German.

A: Mm-hm. That was in the transit camp.

Q: In **Poznań**.

A: Ou-Outside of **Poznań**, yes.

Q: What happened then?

A: We were there til October 10th. We lived in barracks, like you would see barracks in **Auschwitz**, or wherever German camps were. And since she was an educated person, they must have known that she knows some German. But she

had – in **Poznań** my parents had a friend who was of German extraction. He was born in **Poznań**, but his parents came to **Poland**, or one of them did –

Q: **Volksdeutsche**.

A: No, they were Germans.

Q: They were Germans.

A: They were Germans, but they became Polish citizens, because you could become a Polish citizen after you – well, that was the – you know, the – the second **[indecipherable]** that gave them the right. But his father was taken to a camp. He was – they never saw him when he was taken. He had a – like a cleaning outfit, but a large so – practically whole – all of **Poznań** knew who – who he was. And – but the son was a teacher, they had a daughter who was taken in as a – how – how do you say, as a – so they wouldn't feel the persecution being Germans, she had to work in **Berlin**. A hostage, okay, like a hostage. She was allowed to come and visit her parents during certain holidays, and that was it. And she – her name was **Dora** and she would always come and visit my mother, or my mother would go – take the train and go to **Poznań**. And visit her.

Q: This is before she di – before she's –

A: Before – be – be – be – before we were taken out.

Q: Okay. And when you say cleaning business, is that like a dry cleaning business?

A: Yes, yes, dry cleaning.

Q: I see. Okay. And so, how does his life – how does – how does he intersect with your mother?

A: Because he was not well enough to be in the army, in the German army, because they were taken. He knew several languages. He knew French, he knew Polish, he knew German and maybe he knew English, that I don't know. But he was a translator. And when my mother would be – would be called in t – for interrogation, he somehow, as she was passing by, he would tell her, ask for an interpreter. And that's it. Because my mother told me this.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I would always ask her, I said, Mother, I can't take it any more. I don't know, he is – my brother is sick, he is hungry. Di – we had nothing to eat. Now, what – what do I do? Don't worry, **Vouyek**(ph), **Janek**(ph), Uncle **John** will come, and bring something. Because people from the outside could bring something, leave it at the –

Q: Gate.

A: – gate, and – my mother sometimes received it, sometimes she didn't get it, what he brought in. It was food, but one time I remember, and this is stuck in my mind, the Germans had a lot of dogs. And you know the gates, or – or the – it was barricaded, but it was iron barricade. The dogs would –

Q: Crawl underneath.

A: – crawl underneath and make – and Uncle **John** called once. I saw him walking around, and my mother said, go with **Anjay**(ph), and take a walk. Because we had to walk, you know, in order for – for hygienic reasons. And she said, when he tells you to stop, and not look, turn around, and then he will disappear, you see what is there. Once he rolled in an orange. Who could get an orange? He must have gotten it from somebody, okay? And I don't know what I did. My brother was playing ball, and the ball came to the – to the railing. And I think right there, I put my skir – that I remember, I put my skirt on top, and just did oh, **Andrew**, here is the ball. Meanwhile, while I was giving him the ball, the other hand took the orange, and I put it underneath, into my panties. And I came back, and of course, I walking like this. And an – and he said **[speaks Polish]** my stomach is hurting me. And my mother said, what are we going to do now? I said, can't we eat this? But she said, you're going to get all sick. But we ate it anyway, at night when everybody was

sleeping, or so-called sleeping. Because you know, we – we slept, there were one, two, three –

Q: Communal.

A: – yes. Four beds in a line, and you never knew who was what, bunkers, or something like that. But we stayed there four months. When the Red Army started – entered **Auschwitz**, all the German camps began to close. That – you can verify this –

Q: Yes, sure.

A: – in – i-in – in – i-in books, or in – in reports.

Q: Yeah.

A: They started closing. When the opened **Auschwitz**, that was it. That's why on the 10th of October, instead of standing every day from eight o'clock til one o'clock in the center of the – of the –

Q: **A-Appellplatz**?

A: Yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We had to stay there and wait, and if your number was called, that means you would go to your barrack, and somebody would be there, give you whatever. You had to go, take off your clothes. They would take you to a – as my mother called

it, the washing machine. To a barrack where they were – we would – could take a shower. But my mother never allowed us to go alone. We were there only twice. Once when we came in and four months later. And on that day, in the morning, we were told to take our belongings and give all of ours clothing to be put through some kind of a disinfection, and we're going to go to the barrack where everybody – can you imagine? All – all right, this was good thing. It was not very cold, but my brother was shaking, and he says, oh, **woda**, **woda**. He wanted waters, he wanted so badly to get a shower, or – or a tub or something. And my mother said no, we are going to stand in the longest corner, in the darkest corner of the barrack where the – the water is coming out. And you are not going to look at water. You are going to face your – she held our faces to her belly, and she would turn around when the water was coming out, because the water nas – was not only water. There was chlorine coming out, because it smelled awful. You cou – people were –

Q: Choking.

A: – choking. And then it was hot water – I mean, there were people – I mean, this was decimation of people. We got out, thanks to our mother.

Q: So some didn't make it out of there?

A: I – I – my mother said, I don't think that half, at least half didn't make it. Because the older people were left, and were put away into incinerators, because they had incinerators there. Because when I went, 35 laters to **Auschwitz** in '79, my husband wanted to see **Auschwitz**. I went there, and I walked in, and when I saw behind glass, piles of hair, shoes, teeth, I just felt sick. And I walked out, and I started to cry. And I said never, never, it's – everything came back. I was six years old again. And I was –

Q: Even though you weren't in **Auschwitz**, even though this was in **Poznań** where this happened.

A: Yes. It – it was in a transit camp.

Q: Yeah.

A: But this came back, because we had the same things.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: And the pieces of that hard, squared bread, which was something wa – that was more than sawdust. But, you know, th-this – this I – I will never forget.

Q: You were such a child –

A: And for many, many years, I would not touch dark bread, square dartch – dark bread. I could not take it. I would rather turn around instead of, you know, explain or make a face. No, no, it's not good for me, and I wouldn't. Now I have to eat,

because that's part of my diet, but – and I got over it. But I will never go back to **Auschwitz**, never. Cause I don't think I could face it.

Q: I can't imagine. I can't imagine.

A: I wa – I went to the holocaust museum last Saturday to see **Karski** exhibit, and I saw certain pictures and I just turned around and I said no, I – I cannot face it.

Q: You mean the one in **Skokie**?

A: Yes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We were there several times. I went through the entire permanent exhibition of **Auschwitz**, **Birkenau** and – and **Majdanek** and others, pic – the pictures and – and artifacts that they had from those things. And I said no, I will not go there again. Not to that section. Bec –

Q: What happened after – I'm sorry –

A: Yes?

Q: You wanted to say something?

A: No, no.

Q: What happened after you left the room with your mother and the chlorophyll and the water, and everything like that. What did they –

A: We were shoved – we were shoved through a corridor where there were racks, hot racks, where our clothes that we could – if it were ours, or not, you had to take whatever was there, and my mother knew which –

Q: Sizes?

A: – this will – yes, this was fit you, this would fit **Jandrek**(ph), and you know, and so forth on. And we would put that clothes on, and we were – our bags were waiting already. I mean, what kind of bags. We had – I had the little valise like this, and another pair of shoes, which was outgrown already, because it was coming, you know, it was fall. And they put us on a train, on the last 100 wagon train from **Poznań** going –

Q: West.

A: – west. And when we came to the border of **Nordhorn** in **Germany**, there was a stop – or, no, it was not **Germany** – yes, we were in **Germany**, because **Nordhorn** was **Germany**, and then it crossed to **Holland**. And we got – th-the entire train stopped, my mother told me, and I remember this – this barking at – and she says, take – help **Jandrusz**(ph), because he's ill, so that he doesn't wet his pants. Okay, we took, and she said, play dead dog.

Q: Really?

A: **[speaks Polish]** And I know what that means, that means – there were many bushes on – there was a signal, and my mother told me, I apparently had scarlet fever at that time, so I had very high temperature. Because I don't remember what happened, how I got, but eight days later I woke up in a beautiful white child bed in a hospital. And I looked around, and there was my brother laying in another bed, still in fever.

Q: So the last memory – memory you have is la – re – at this train station –

A: Yes th – in the bushes.

Q: – where it stops –

A: Yes.

Q: – and your – you leave the train, and there's some bushes –

A: Yes.

Q: – and your mother says, play dead dog.

A: Yes. Play dead dog. And I don't know where she went. I – I cannot see her. I only remember that my – not privilege, but my – I had to take care –

Q: Your duty.

A: My duty was to my brother, to take care of him.

Q: Okay.

A: **Izbisznik**(ph) was not with me, so I – I was always looking, where's the other one? Because I was so used to it that there were two –

Q: Two.

A: – two with me. But no – and he was so weak, that he just fell, and that's it. And only after two weeks, when I came really through, my mother told me that thank – I don't know why I did this, but we are in a evangelical hospital, run by the evangelical nuns.

Q: In other words, the Lutherans.

A: Yes, but they were called – they were – this was a Swiss order.

Q: **Evangelische**?

A: **Evangelische**, yes, Lutheran, uh-huh, **Evangelische schwester**.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: They had navy blue garbs, white coifs with rows, and they all had beautiful, long hair. Some of them were very princely. There were baronesses, there was a – countesses, very wealthy women who did not want to marry this one or that one, would go to such an order.

Q: And –

A: But they were this – they ran a hospital, because the hospital was right like on a peninsula.

Q: Okay. Well, how did you get from the bushes near the train station, to that hospital?

A: My mother told me, when I came through –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and – and I will –

Q: Woke up.

A: Woke up, but when I could talk with her, she told me – I said, Mother, why am I – I never had a bed like this. Where – where are we? And she told me that in the evening a farmer was coming with hay and some turnips and – and potatoes. And she found her German language and ask him – he – she said, he spoke **Plattdeutsch**. He spoke, you know –

Q: Low German.

A: – low – low German, but he understood what she wanted. And she pointed to the two children laying there, and he told her he's going to take her – us, to the hospital. And he took us there, my mother said it was two or three kilometers from that place, there was the hospital.

Q: My question is also, why did – how did the guards not see you? Where did the rest of the people go?

A: Timing. They had to – it had to be anybody who was sick, they would throw them out anyway, on one side or the other side of the train. On the same train was my mother – grandmo – godmother, with her two sons.

Q: Yeah.

A: Who in **Russolt**(ph) had a hor – she was – she had many Arabian horses. She was training them –

Q: She had a horse farm.

A: Yes, she had a horse farm. And she was taken, her husband was taken, he was – he disappeared, I think he just was taken to a concentration camp, period. And they were very – they were quite wealthy, because they had a big estate, and all that stuff.

Q: To have a horse farm, you have to be –

A: Yes, and they – and they ha – and she and those two boys were on that train from some – probably from **Poznań** because that train was coming from **Poznań** stood from the ci – center of the city. Stopped there what – where the camp was, the transit camp, and we didn't know this until later on, when m-my mother found out, because she wrote – right under, or before, or when they hit the border, there was a – a mine exploded, and many of the carts were turned over, people were

killed. One of the boys died. Now, I don't know if the older boys died – died, or the younger one, cause I never found out.

Q: So this was by the Dutch border.

A: Yes, by the Dutch border, right.

Q: Okay. And then the rest of the people, who were still prisoners, were taken someplace, is that correct?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Were taken someplace.

A: Yes, they were taken to labor camps.

Q: And you – and your mother kind of got you off of the train?

A: Right, right.

Q: And – i-in a moment when nobody was looking? Is this –

A: Everybody. Everybody was coming out, you see.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Everybody was supposed to come out. This was yo-your – your last chance.

Q: Your last stop, or your last chance?

A: Well, our last chance before we go to the freedom. This is what we – my mother said later on, when we were talking about it. Sure, because the Germans were taking us out of the bombardment – bombardments and –

Q: Into labor camps.

A: Yes. Yes, either to work on farms, or in factories, or wherever.

Q: An-And she knew your – your – you two were sick?

A: Yes, because she worked in the sanitary barrack –

Q: Okay.

A: – where they used – where – where they were disposing ointments, aspirin, and – and so forth on.

Q: Okay.

A: Medications of some kind.

Q: So it was a split moment.

A: Yes.

Q: It was a split second sort of –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: – how can we hide from this crowd of people.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Okay, now I get it. So you – now you wake up in the ca – in the hospital, and it's a nice bed, and it's warm and it – and did that mean freedom, real freedom?

A: I don't – I didn't know. I didn't know where I was.

Q: Well, after she told you these things.

A: Well, she told me this many days later, because apparently, she said, I was so – I had such a fever that I was incommunicative for the eight days.

Q: Okay.

A: That I just lay there and she said they were putting me in – in cold tubs or something to, you know –

Q: Cool you down.

A: – to cool – to cool me down. And then they found out – I found out that I wanted to talk to my mother and I could not because I was stuck, I had – they didn't know what it was. Apparently it was lockjaw. And then, after lockjaw, I got another measles, germ – the German measles, so I was locked up for another six months in a dark room. I could understand everything, but I could not communicate. I could show, I could write, but I could not speak.

Q: **[inaudible]**

A: And the doctor, who was – he was a Dutchman, Dr. **Becker**, who helped my mother – my mother worked in that hospital in a – a sewing room where they were repairing the bedsheets and sewing other necessary things and cleaning and ironing and so forth on. But she did not live in the hospital. She lived in a place that I found out only after Christmas, she lived under the stable. I said, what is under the stable? They had – the nuns had built a refuge for people who were

running away, for soldiers, officers, people – Belgians, Yugoslavs, you name it. And there were over 200 beds underneath the stable built.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: Nobody knew, and nobody discovered, even though, besides the nuns, the **Evangelische schwester**, there were 30 brown **schwester**. Those were **Hitlerjugend** nurses. Not in white and blue stripes, but white and brown stripes. That's why they were called the brown **schwesters**. And when the nuns ate, my brother and I, we ate with them, because one of the nuns, Sister **Marta**, decided that we were her nieces, and that we were in the hospital. My brother didn't speak German, he didn't even want to speak, period. He only talked to me – to my ear, when he wanted. But they took us, when we finished eating, they – the nuns left, and then the other sisters, the brown **schwesters**, the nurses came, and they sat in a different part of the – of the – what the ta – their tables was in a different –

Q: In the dining room.

A: – room in the dining room, right. And they had different dishes, because this was all provided by the –

Q: **Hitlerjugend** organization, mm-hm.

A: Mm-hm. We stayed there til Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday, I couldn't stand it, it was so loud. All the bells all of a sudden started to ring. I said, Mama, what is

going on? The Canadian Mountain Police regiment came first. The Canadian – the Canadians came in and – because **Holland** was already free.

Q: Yeah.

A: They marched, and all the bells in **Nordhorn** started to ring and then in – then the next and the next. And when my mother found this out, she went to Dr. **Becker** and she said, this is the end. She said, it's not signed yet, but the war is over, because I received it from **Munich**, from the Americans, that the end – it's the end of the war.

Q: On that Palm Sunday?

A: Yes, on that Palm Sunday. We were – I think we were the first ones to know about it, because it came from **Holland**. They just came across the bridge and went – came into **Nordhorn**, and that's it.

Q: It's in the – I – I'd have to look back on the calendar to find out when Palm Sunday was that year, whether it was early April, or later April, or –

A: You know, that I don't know. My mother s – my mother said, I think it was in the middle of '45 of April.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes, '45.

Q: So another three or four weeks and then it's done.

A: Yes. That's right.

Q: And –

A: And she found out a month – I think it took us another month, my mother found out that the General **Machuk**(ph) **Cross**, who was with the British Army, the – the division – artillery division was coming through from **Belgium** through **Holland** and into **Germany** and then crossing over. They – they stopped and – in **Lingen**, which was, I think, not far away from **Nordhorn**, and there a – a – a camp that was a concentration camp for Russians, Yugoslavs, Ukrainians, Serbs and **[indecipherable]**

Q: Slavs.

A: All kinds of Slavs, because he was not only decimate only the Jews, but all the Slavs too –

Q: Yeah.

A: – because they were – somehow they were together in – into – in this war. And my mother found out that there's an organization from United Refugee association or organization, **UNRRA**.

Q: Oh yeah, **UNRRA**, mm-hm.

A: **UNRRA**. That they were trying to organize that camp for the other people that were on the German soil.

Q: So refugees, for – for refugees.

A: Yes, the refugees, yes. The deported people, right, **DPs**, as we were called.

Q: Yeah, **DP**, displaced persons.

A: Yes. We were really – well, we were displaced, but we were not displaced, we were – we were just transported. As an Australian 35 years later in **America** told me, he says, don't you ever call yourself a **DP**. You are a delayed pilgrim. When somebody called oh, you must be – not long ago somebody had some kind of an interview of people, and somebody says, oh, she's a newcomer. I said oh yes, thir – 65 years ago I came to this country. I'm only a delayed pilgrim. He said, and what is that? He took off the – the macro – microphone. I said, a delayed pilgrim means the pilgrim who came later than the first pilgrims. Like 500 years ago, 400 years ago later. But it was, you know, that was something –

Q: Amazing.

A: And then we stayed in the camp. My mother **[indecipherable]** the do – the doctor found a transport for us that we were taken to the camp. It was awful. It was awful. Dead bodies, children slaughtered. I mean, it was awful. I couldn't – I just couldn't. I just took my brother and I sat under a tree and I said – and I just started crying, and that's it. I said, I don't want to be here, I want to go back to the

hospital. But of course, you know the army came in, cleared, and there were people who knew how to organize things, who had the –

Q: So that meant the – these were the last prisoners who didn't make it, who were killed in that camp?

A: Right, right.

Q: And they even had children in there?

A: Yes. Oh yes. And children found – went in barracks and places where it's unspeakable to – to say it.

Q: And you, as a seven year old sees all this.

A: Yes, that – that – you know, I – that's why, when somebody's tell me, how was your childhood, I never had a childhood. And I don't think I'm the only one. There were many children who never had a childhood.

Q: Did that have effects later on in life?

A: I think so. My uncle always called me – he said, you know, you are a martyr. I said, why? You're always – you're always looking for something to do, you're always helping somebody, you always want to do this. Everything has to be cleaned, every – because I had the – oh, I couldn't stand dirt, or anything that was crawling and moving, because I saw it under my skin, the bedbugs and – and the lice, and everything else. It was awful. Of course my hair was completely shaven

when I was in the hospital because it was falling off anyway. And – but somehow, you know, we survived, because my mother signed a paper in December of 1944 in the hospital. Dr. **Beck – Becker** asked her and told her that because this was a non-Nazi hospital, they had to accept all wounded majors, captains, generals, etcetera, etcetera, the higher officers of Germans were there. And they were the first ones to receive – that hospital was the first one to receive penicillin. And he said, and in order for her to speak, the only thing that I know that could help her is ultraviolet ray infiltration. So they –

Q: For you to speak.

A: To – to – yes, to loosen up, to –

Q: The lockjaw.

A: Yes, the lockjaw. And it worked apparently, because it took three – three months.

Q: So what was the paper that she signed?

A: She had to sign agreeing, because –

Q: Agreeing what?

A: That she permits us to get penicillin, and get the ultraviolet rays. Because it was unknown if it's going to cure –

Q: Or not.

A: – or not. My mother said, it's a 50-50 chance. He says yes. You don't know, and we don't know, but can we try? And in the hospital we had a stamp here, and they eradicated.

Q: Really?

A: Yes, yes, we were stamped.

Q: Did you have a number?

A: I – we – that – I remember one zero something, and six four, and I don't know whatever. It was a longer number, but I don't remember. I – I just – when, many times I would get up and say, why this number comes back to me? And my mother said, because it was a number that was given to you. And because I had to remember it when I went to the – to the **platz** at eight o'clock in the morning, and waited there with my brother. It was rain or shine, we had to be there.

Q: So this was daily?

A: Daily.

Q: So while you were in the transit camp outside **Poznań –**

A: Yes.

Q: – there was this – this system, this order –

A: Yes.

Q: Not order in the sense of things are in order, but this rule that the **appell**, the – the – the calling and the confirming of the numbers of prisoners – which is usually what it is, but I don't know whether they counted you or not.

A: That I don't know, but there were people who were taken out of the camp, put on a train to – outside to work someplace, to factories, to farms, for –

Q: During this time?

A: During this time, yes, yes.

Q: During this eight – six or – yes.

A: Because – because when we would come back, we would see, oh this bunk is free, this one is all the things are taken out.

Q: I see.

A: And it's being disinfected, so that means something – something has – I asked my mother once, and she said, because those people left already. And those that didn't make it were put aside, and – toward the incineration, that's it. Tha-That was the only way to tak – to get rid of the bodies. But you know, I don't like to go back through – I do not think – that's why I was very hesitant to – to – because it – I know I'm not going to sleep tonight.

Q: I'm so sorry.

A: But that's – you know, somebody asked me once also, when I was in – in **Washington**, and I said, why shou – why do you want this information? Why do you want to interrogate me? This is not interrogation, we want to see what happened. Because you – your papers – you do – you don't have certain papers, you don't have this. I said, because I don't have anything. If you want to, why don't you write to **Germany**? Or find out?

Q: Did your daughter ever ask you about this stuff?

A: I think she knows certain things because I said, ask **Grandma**. That means, ask my mother. I said, my mother will tell you certain things. But my mother was very – she w – she was not scrupulous, but she only said – only told her certain things and that's it. In general, that's it, because she says, I don't want her sh – because my daughter is very sensitive. She knows that, you know, his mother lived to be 103, despite the fact that she – it was meant for her to live that long. But they were very, very close, as a – as a family. The only time that he was away, and not living with her, was the two years that he was in the **United States Army**.

Q: That is your husband and his mother.

A: Yes, yes. She lived here, with us. I actually married both of them, as I always said. Yes. And you know, it was – it was different. She, in her later life dwelled on it. It was part of her **[indecipherable]**. She wrote certain poems, are very, very

strong, very beautiful, very formative. And I told him, I said, you know, I found certain papers, going through some of the things. He still doesn't want to go and see them.

Q: Of course.

A: But, I said, you know, they're very good poems. And he said well, you would know. Of course, I – I am not – I am not a literary major, but I – I was a – I recited poetry, not only of Polish, but of – in – in – in Italian, and in – in English, and – and I love poetry. And you know, certain poems, when I had to translate from French into English and then write about it, what it really meant.

Q: Yeah.

A: I would always get the best results on my – on – on my grading papers. And sometimes says, how do you know this? I said, well, I happened to go through certain things, which I can read between the lines. And she says yes, exactly, here it is. This is what the poet says. So, you know, it was something – I can feel when she was not indulging herself into the poem, but what was going on, the essence was – is there.

Q: Yes. Of what your – your mother-in-law was writing.

A: Yes, yes, and I think – he said, you know what? I think I'm going to look into it and we're going to ask someone who does these things, edits, and to find out if – if

it wouldn't be worthwhile to publish it, you know. Because I think it would be – this is something that she left behind her.

Q: It's a legacy. Its' a legacy.

A: Yes, it is. It is.

Q: I just can't be – I – I'm still amazed. In all of the things that you are describing, they're known, but they're not known. They're known because we know the history –

A: Yes.

Q: – but we don't know the individual's history.

A: Right, right.

Q: And I just keep going in – over in my mind, a five year old girl, a six year old girl, a seven year old girl. It's still a baby. In my mind that's still a baby.

A: I was not –

Q: I remember my own daughter, and she was – she is still my baby, but – but you know what I mean? It is a child who was still so innocent, and all that you were exposed to during that time.

A: I don't know when I was a child.

Q: I've noticed.

A: I don't know. I always think I was a grown-up. They used to call me **stara**(ph) **marinka**(ph). That means –

Q: And what does that mean? The old one?

A: No, young but old.

Q: Yeah, a young girl –

A: Because –

Q: – maybe an old soul, as they say in English.

A: I don't know. Because, you know, it's something I – and really I cannot say that I played, or that I would love to do this. Yes, the only time that I could say that I played was with the lead soldiers during – you know, it used to be even – the whole world had it. And when my two cousins, and all the four cousins would get together, or all of us 11 got there on the floor, and we would **[indecipherable]** I said, look, there's the enemy. Who's the general? On which side? So they started quarreling; this one, this one, this one. And then finally **Izbisznik**(ph), my cousin would say, let her be the genel – the general, she's a girl. She has nobody to quarrel with. So, you know, it's – yes, that – that I think will stay with me, that – and my – and my uncle, you know, says **[indecipherable]** he said always, you are such a masochist. I said, why? He said, because if – you always – your hand always have to be busy, you're doing this, you have to have this on, you have to

go this. You – you put your – you're going shopping, but no, there's a lady across, you have to go and take her over to the street. Why? I said, Uncle, because that's what a Girl Scout does, doesn't it? Besides, there were people who helped us when we were unable to do it ourselves, because that's what Mother said. Sometimes people would take us by the hands and – or carry us even, because we were so weak. But, you know – and I do realize, a war is a war. A lot of things happen. But I –

Q: This is more than that.

A: – but I don't want to – I – I really don't want to go through it again.

Q: No, of course not.

A: Please. No.

Q: Your life – tell us a little bit about your life after your father comes back, and how does it become normal **[indecipherable]** yes.

A: Okay. When my father came back and a different – bo – being both teachers, they needed, they were organizing schools. My mother was a good organizer, and the man whom I called uncle, who became our adopted uncle, he became the director of – of this camp, and then it – we find out there was 15,000 people in it. But he knew how to –

Q: Organize.

A: – organize it, yes. He was in **AK** so, you know, and he was fighting in **Warsaw** and all that stuff.

Q: **AK** means **Armia Kryova**.

A: Yeah, **Armia ka – Armia Kryova**, yes. So, you know, it was – it was something that people had, the energy, wanted to build, wanted to form something, wanted to – to get rid of this dust that was on – upon us. That we wanted to live like normal people. The first thing that was cleaned was one barrack that the mass of thanksgiving was going to be said. A chaplain came in, whom we befriended – my mother loved to write – to – to play Bridge, so every Saturday or Friday night, they would play Bridge, because it – this was something that would take them away. It was – it was something different. It was more intellectual than – than anything. And – and the teachers were needed, so my father, when he became better and better, he said look, somebody has to take care of this. So they said, you know, you used to be a te – a director of school here in this school, in this region and that region. Why don't you take this? You can't be doing too much of carrying, organizing, but you can organize school. You can organize the classes. You can ev-evaluate th-the students who are there. The first grade. I never went to first grade, because I was **[speaks Polish]**

Q: You were **[indecipherable]** okay.

A: So why should I go to first grade, second grade, because I would be bored. I would be telling a 20 year old what is **a**,**b**,**c**, the alphabet, because she didn't know. She came from a eastern side of **Poland**, someplace from behind **Bug**. She heard that people went to school, but she had to work on the field. And – but now she was 20 years old, and she wants to know.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's over, the war is over, I want to do something. I want to be a human being. So my father said, oh no, you stay home, and you teach your younger brother, and that's it. And you read –

Q: And how long – yeah, how long did you stay in this place?

A: In **Lingen**(ph) – in li – in **Linden**(ph), we stayed until '46, and then another camp was being organized, we went to **Ferzen**(ph). **Ferzen**(ph) was a concentration camp for the Yugoslav.

Q: And then it was changed?

A: And it was changed, because we were – we were actually under the British occupation of – of that segment of **Germany**. The –

Q: Yeah.

A: – the –

Q: The British zone.

A: – th-the British zone.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes. All the way up to **Wiesbaden**, that was also a part of it. Americans took everything below of – o-of – be – bevow – below – not **Leipzig**, the other one. **Lubeka**(ph). **Lubeck**(ph). **[indecipherable]** that was, and when the French gave up their occupation, the Americans took that zo – all of that part was – was under American occupation. And we were i – on the northwestern part.

Q: So you stayed there til ’47?

A: We stayed til – i-in **Ferzen**(ph), and then we went six weeks here, three weeks there, and we were moved where he was needed to organize a school, and shipped to another place. The longest we stayed, in **Braunschweig**, which was almost in the middle.

Q: Yeah.

A: And closer to the Russian border. We were in **Hildesheim**, which was the last –

Q: You mean the East German border.

A: The East German border –

Q: German border.

A: – yes. We were in hel – in **Hildesheim**, which was right across the street were the – were the Russians. This was the close they –

Q: Okay, so you were really close to –

A: We – yes.

Q: – where the border was.

A: And then from there, we moved to – to **Braunschweig**, and we stayed in **Braunschweig** there.

Q: And you never di – and you – there was a decision you don't go back to your hometown, you don't go back to ko – **Kościan**.

A: My f – grandfather – my father's father wrote him a letter. He could not write what he wanted, but he said, there is a big body of water, and another world is waiting for you. He had his answer. He was packed in 1944, when we lived in **Mappen**(ph) **rosa**(ph), coming from – from **Nordhorn**, and he wanted to go back and rebuild **Poland**. And my mother said, I am not going. And he got the answer. He was ready to leave, and I think that changed his mind. He said, **Jusef**(ph) –

Q: His own father.

A: Yes. God bless, and that's – that's all he wrote. Nothing was erased. Later on when we were already in **Braunschweig**, we received letters with –

Q: That were censored.

A: That were censored, yes. And we knew. But we stayed in **Braunschweig**, and in **Braunschweig** in '48, at the **NWCW**. **En-sa-voot-sa**(ph). Ens – yes, **NCWC**,

the National Catholic Welfare Conference was organized in **America**, and they were trying to receive people who would sponsor, as sponsors for the people that were **displayed** in – in **Germany**, and in other countries was – as I was told.

Q: And that's how you got to –

A: But – but – and my parents signed three papers. One to **England**, one to **Australia**, **Argentina**, **Brazil** and **America**.

Q: Five.

A: And yugo – yes, five papers. And you had to go to the first one that received you. The first one came to **America**. And then came, I think **Australia**. And my mother said, I don't want to see kangaroos, and I don't – I don't think I want to live there. And my father said, well, okay, so we were – we're stuck with this. As – as an officer, he should have gone – he could have gone to **England**. But there were three children, because my youngest brother was born in '46, in **Mappen**(ph). So we could not move, we could not go, because **England** had its own problems, and they would take single people, and the most people with one f – one child, yes. Married people yes, but with one child only.

Q: And so it was the **United States**.

A: It was the **United States**, and we left in 1949. We traveled actually from August til September, because when we – everything was written, everything was

cleared, my youngest brother decided to – not to take a nap. But when my bag was covered, he didn't see me, he saw only my bag was turned af – from him. He loved pears, and he grabbed a pear from the table and ate it and got such a stomachache that he was convulsing. They took him to the hospital, he was there for a week. So –

Q: You didn't leave yet.

A: – all our papers were delayed, we cannot go, we were going to take a train and go to **Bremerhaven**.

Q: Yeah, **Bremerhaven**.

A: And – and – and – and take there. So, we went in **September**, we were moved there, to another camp, and they said, okay, no bed works.

Q: No pears.

A: Wa – watch your kid. No – no fruit of any kind.

Q: No pancakes.

A: He wer – oh, he loved pears and **Naptha-Fels** soap. When he grabbed that, he just put in his mouth and just – and he just ate it.

Q: Soap?

A: He needed – he needed phosphate.

Q: Oh my. Oh my.

A: Or, he would go outside, and wherever he saw pieces of – of walls, you know, from the barracks, he would take and put in his fingers, it had calcium and something else in th – in – in the composition of – of the walls. **[indecipherable]** it was a strange child. But the pear really did it.

Q: Yeah.

A: It delayed us by two and a half mon-months, and we left actually on – again, on the 10th of October, from **Bremen**.

Q: In 1949.

A: In 1949, on General **Black**, which was an army sh-ship.

Q: Ship.

A: Yes.

Q: And sailed into **New York**?

A: Sailed – we a – no, we had to detour and go to **Ellis Island**, my mother, I and the youngest one. My father and **Andrew** went to **New York**, then they took us back on the ship, 24 hours later from **Ellis Island** and brought us to **New York** harbor. That's where I got my green card.

Q: And how did you end up here in **Chicago**?

A: We had a sponsor in **Wisconsin**, who happened to be a **Jehovah Witness**. He found out that my father was well-educated, knew several languages, and that –

cause they wanted somebody to run their community. They needed a bishop, and they would make him a bishop. And my father says, never! And it was cat – well, you know, through **NW – NCWC**. They found out, they said this man – that family cannot, they are Roman Catholic. So, when we changed trains from **New York** at **Union Station** and got on the – the **Hiawatha** train, we landed in – in **Lisbon**, and there was nobody to pick us up. And half an hour later came a – a priest, and spoke to us in English, sort of sounding Polish, and said, I will have to take you. My mother lives here, not far away, and we're going – we have to talk. We had to find another sponsor. There's a woman who will take you. She has one goat and two rabbits, and – and – and three or four chickens, and she has a small garden, and she would lo – she would love to take you in. Oh, my goodness. My mother cried. Of course it was impossible. She was lately demented, but she was a very good woman. And the priest himself realized that this was not the place. So he called the chancellery office in that area, and we landed in **New Lisbon**, not far from **Mauston**, **Wisconsin**. And a farmer, a Mr. **Barlette**(ph), who was a Belgian, married to an Irish woman, they had a big farm. A very wealthy man, cause he had 500 cattles and all that stuff and – and oh, acres and acres of – of fields. And we were there for six weeks, but my father had to work from four o'clock in the morning til eight o'clock at midnight – at night, and many milking and doing all

farm work. I mean, you know, he was not – physically he was not ready to do this, to work like this. He wanted any work, he never complained. I had to say he never – but my mother work – worked as a housekeeper. She cleaned the whole house, all the windows. I was just turned 11 years old. I was ironing 30 shirts a week, because there were people working, and doing things. In the morning we got up at six o'clock and at 6:30 we had – we walked three miles to **New Lisbon**, cat – caught a bus that took us to **Mauston**, to a Catholic school, which was run by German nuns. And at least I could confer – converse freely with somebody. I knew some English, because I – we were taught English by the British soldiers. They were – one time we had a English major, and then we had a Scottish sergeant. And he ri – loved the Polish language because it was such a beautiful **R**. We could roll our **Rs**, as he said.

Q: As they can too.

A: And they can too. O-Only th-they can too. So, you know, it was – but I knew German very well, and English was in my ears. I could hear it, but it was difficult for me to – to express myself, because the German would –

Q: Come in.

A: Come in, and well, it – it worked itself out. The Father **Evans** who took care of us, he said, you know, I received a call from the **Chicago** chancellery, and there's

a Franciscan priest, who apparently knows you. And yes, because he was in **Auschwitz**, and then he was in **Dachau**. And he came out, and he lived with us and – in li – **Lingen**(ph). And I think then the order asked him to – to come to **America**. And he stayed here, because he had **TB**. But he came out of it, and we only saw him here for a very few weeks, and he orga – he found somebody here to take care of us, and –

Q: In **Chicago**.

A: In **Chicago**, and we left – we got here of – three or four days before Thanksgiving.

Q: In 1950?

A: In 1949.

Q: In 1949.

A: Mm-hm. November – I don't know if was 24th or 25th. November something.

Q: Very symbolic.

A: So ever since, we lived in –

Q: In **Chicago**.

A: – in – in **Chicago**. We lived first at **Saint Adalbert's** Church – parish, **17th Street** and **Ashland**. And then we moved later on to – to the north – northern side, and –

Q: And you met Mr. **Pawlikowski** in what year? In the 50s?

A: Oh, in 1957? Yes, 1957 at the scouting celebration of – of Christmas and I happened to be playing the role of Blessed Virgin, because I had hair long down to hear. So – and I sang, apparently, pretty well. So I had my – and I didn't have time to even comb it properly, I just put it in the – in back with a – with a ribbon, and – and – and –

Q: It worked.

A: Yes, and I had a uni – my scout uniform, and – and we were pouring coffee and tea, and bringing, you know, sweets to the – to the parents, and – and guests and that's how – and then he realized that he saw the same girl in church that he saw in the uniform. And he stopped me one day when I was coming from **North Avenue**, and that's how it started.

Q: A nice debut. A nice debut. Well, is there anything else you would like to add to what we've talked about today? Is there something – again, as I asked Mr. **Pawlikowski**, is there something you'd like your granddaughter, **Kinga**(ph) to understand about what happened to you, what you went through, how you came out of it?

A: Endurance. It – it – it requires a personal endurance. And education, and following the right way. Always be noble. Even if one makes a mistake, it is not a

sin to say, I done this and then apologize. Otherwise, if you don't have the nobility to do this, the noble heart, then you're not a full person. And if – and have a strong belief in what you want to do, and follow it. Follow your calling. But first, learn. Get a good education, just like we tried to instill it in our daughter, who went through the Jesuit education for nine years, and – and got a scholarship, full scholarship to in – to **Loyola**, and then –

Q: Congratulations.

A: – and studied a whole year in **Rome**. So it was – it was an opening. She was 21, she – on her 21st birthday, she went to **Poland** and had the Christmas – she could have come to **Chicago**, she could have come here. But she went over thor – there, and she brought a Polish soul with her. They didn't even want to celebrate **Wigilia**, which is the Christmas eve. And she says, what? I am going to buy the Christmas tree, I am going to dress it, and I am going to set the **Wigilia** for you. I will go and stand in line and buy fish. And this was only what, '87? Winter of '87. And she did it.

Q: Wow, that's quite a legacy for your granddaughter to have.

A: Yes.

Q: And quite a testament to you that – that she was so strong, and she exhibited that.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Your daughter –

A: And the fam – and she even made the family, the men, who said, oh, you know, I'm a doctor, I'm doing this, I'm so tired. Why should I dress – and she said, we always dress for **Wigilia**. What kind of a Pollack are you? So –

Q: Well, it's a testament to you. Thank you very, very much.

A: Thank you. Thank you for listening.

Q: And thank you for sharing. And I know the cost, and I appreciate that you were willing to do it anyway. It's a real gift. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you, you're the first person that I have shared so much.

Q: I appreciate it. I appreciate it very much.

A: Thank you.

Q: And this concludes our interview with Mrs. **Jolanta Maria**?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – **Kurczak Pawlikowski**, on January 21st, 2015.

A: Okay, thank you.

Conclusion of Interview