GILBRIDE, Bozenna Urbonowicz
RG-50.233*0032
Interviewed on April 15, 1992
Garden City, Long Island, New York

Abstract

Bozenna Gilbride, née Urbonowicz, was born to Christian farming parents, Wictor and Janina (Janka), in Wolyn, near Tuczyn, Poland. Her father hid Jews in a shed on his farm early in World War II, and was arrested often. In late summer 1943, they barely escaped when their farm and village were burned to the ground by Ukrainians who "butchered" the villagers. Her family immigrated to Germany, unaware of what was happening there, Bozenna says. At Freiburg (Freiburg im Breisgau), Germany, eight-year-old Bozenna and her family worked in a factory making leather goods for German soldiers. An aunt gave birth to a baby. Germans drained its blood for German troops, and the baby died.

The family was moved to a slave labor camp in Chemnitz, where her parents worked in a munitions factory. Bozenna contracted TB, and friends saved her from receiving a lethal shot by switching her medical papers. Her mother was suspected of being in the Polish underground, so German troops beat her and sent her to Ravensbruck, where she was sterilized. Her mother was sent eventually to Gross-Rosen.

Bozenna says the worst part of all her experience was being separated from her mother. The father and the four children remained together throughout the war.

When the American front approached their camp, the Germans took the several hundred inmates to the nearest city, and dumped them on the sidewalk. They walked for days. Germans gave them food they begged for, but would not allow them to sleep on their property.

Eventually, the family was in a DP camp in Leipzig from 1945 until the beginning of 1947, when they immigrated to the United States. Bozenna was 12 and a half years old.

After the war, the mother returned to Poland. She wrote to relatives in US, who said her family was in New York City. Denied a visa, the mother joined the Polish underground, and was imprisoned. Eventually freed, and finally granted a visa, she joined the family in NYC in 1957.

Tape 1 Side A

My father was a farmer. I think he was self-educated; he had schooling. He was in the Polish Army (AK), as were my uncles. My mother came from a farming family too. She came from a large family, as did my father. My mother's family seemed to be very musically inclined. Everybody took to an instrument. Nobody sang, though. Grandmother, my father's mother, left for America, I think, in 1938, and stayed in America. She never returned. And my father, the last son to marry, took over the farm and ran it for profit.

And your mother, she helped?

She worked side by side. There's even a story that she had a baby in the field, wrapped it up and returned to work. I don't know if it's just as accurate as they tell it.

But you weren't that baby?

I wasn't that baby, no. It was later on.

What was religious life in your family?

As far as school goes, I remember being taught religion in our local school, we observed all holy days. Church, we had to walk. Sometimes we would use the wagon and go to church in Tuczyn. In Tuczyn, my father had a wonderful friend, Mr. Friedman. The reason they were such good friends is they dealt in the market together, selling vegetables and farm goods. I remember one time Friedman sent me a pair of white galoshes. I had never seen white galoshes in my life. I didn't know what they were for. You put them over the shoes. I didn't know that.

And what did you do with them?

I just wore them and flopped around in the galoshes in the house. I thought, gee what wonderful floppy shoes, you know, and they were white. I'd never seen white shoes before.

What was the house like? I imagine it would be a farmstead?

Yes, we had three rooms, a very large living room, with many windows, kitchen, and one bedroom. I remember sleeping sometimes in the living room because it was warmer by the stove. In Poland, they had stoves that you would warm up in the kitchen, and the wall behind, sometimes three walls from the other sides would keep the other rooms warm, so it depended, I guess what the situation was, how many of us were in the same room.

And I, being the oldest of four children, I was already responsible to go out with the cows into the meadow and stay there all day, which I didn't like, I didn't like getting up so early in the morning. It was barely daybreak, and I heard my father or mother calling me. Oh, how I hated that part. I didn't want to come out of bed, but I did. I would go out to the fields, and I would cry almost the whole day that I had to go.

So walking the cows out -- was that your primary job?

That was my primary thing, and I had to learn horseback riding, bareback. That was very hard because the horse that was mine, Mischka, (Myszka?) which means a "little mouse", Mischka was very frisky and every time Mischka would bend down her head to graze, I would slide down. And I would cry, why would she do that to me, why didn't she let me sit on top, because my father would get furious, 'Can't you catch on that if you go into the grass, the horse is going to bend down and graze and then you'll slide right down'.

And how long did it take for you…?

I don't remember, I don't remember if I ever mastered, but I know that when we left Poland I thought about Mischka a lot. That was my horse, she was a very smart horse. When I fell down one time and she was walking, everyone said that she's going to trample me. But Mischka, I don't know how she did this. I fell down, I was in her path. She stepped over me. She knew that I was there, and she just kept going, but she stepped over me. I remember my father or mother screaming "'Bozenna, Bozenna, Bozenna'". I was in the path of that horse. But Mischka didn't hurt, she just stepped over me.

Now, you rode Myszka not as sport, this was not sport, this was…?

Sport, no this was for sport. I was learning, I was learning, but eventually I would have to master. Everybody had to learn these things. Skiing was something, was something you had to learn. There wasn't much to do on a farm.

It was dull?

We didn't know it was dull, no. It wasn't what our children have now.

Did you have electricity?

No. I remember a wireless radio though. And when we left Poland, when we ran, I remember running and thinking, oh, my gosh, we left that wireless behind. I thought that was magic, my radio. It was forbidden to listen to, forbidden.

Under the Germans or under the Russians?

Communists, Communists, yes. We kept it in the drawer in our bedroom, covered with cloth. And the only time they listened to the wireless was if you invited a neighbor or two. This way, they wouldn't give you away.

Accomplices?

Right, right. But I remember my father talking about Hitler. I had no idea who Hitler was.

What did your father say about Hitler?

I remember him saying, "'Oh my God, what is he doing now.'" That's about all I remember, "'Look what he's doing now,'" in shock, you know, "'Look what he's doing now.'" But I never knew what he was doing.

You didn't even know he was a German or a Nazi or anything of that sort?

I had no idea. Even in school at Christmas time when the Communist authorities would come to inspect the schools, our teachers would suddenly speak Russian. We were told that when authorities would come, that they will ask you, "'And who gives you candy?'" We were supposed to shout, 'Papa Stalin gives us candy!' And then they would throw candy at us, which they did. They would throw handfuls and handfuls of wrapped candy at us, and we would squeal with delight. We had no idea who Stalin was. We had no television, no regular papers, wireless was forbidden, how would you know anything, especially children? Nothing, children were protected all the time. You tell children nothing, that's the best way.

Did your parents ever talk about these things to you? Did they coach you in any way?

My only coaching came, there was one warm summer, my mother sent me to the River Bug [ph 78], which was in our front yard almost. We had a shed there, and my mother's instructions were to take the bread and soup to these people and give it to them. But if you are stopped on the road, turn around, speak to no one, and come right back home. And I did this repeatedly, over and over, but I never saw people in the shed, just hands. I didn't know if they were men or women or children. There was no way of knowing. And this would go on, and then they would stop, these visits to the shed. And then later, they would resume again. And my father, at that time, he was arrested frequently.

This would have been under the Russians?

Still under Communism, yes. And I didn't know why, I thought this had something to do with him being in the military. At this point my aunt, the wife of the Polish officer, moved in with us one night. In the middle of the night she came, and it was all very hush-hush, whispers. She was pregnant then, and had three little boys. But my uncle, her husband, was nowhere in sight that night. She didn't stay long with us. The Communists came in the middle of the night, grabbed her, the three little children, and they were shipped to Siberia. At that time, we didn't know where they took them. But after the war, we had the full story. She lost the little baby girl in Siberia.

Do you know when this happened?

My recollection is, it was less than a year before we left Poland, less. We left Poland in 1943, and it was before that, but not long. It wasn't long before that.

But under the Russians?

Oh, yes, yes. Now I know that those people that my father was giving the shed to, and hiding them, they were friends of friends, Jewish friends. I found out, when I got to America after the war, that that's who these people were, I never knew who these people were, they were just people. The children were protected, don't tell the children too much. Tell them nothing, it's even better. So we never knew.

Under the Russian occupation in 1939, did your father lose his farm?

No, it became a collective farm. I remember that you couldn't kill a pig. I remember that my father and neighbors did kill a pig together, slaughtered it and divided it. You couldn't do it alone because you were afraid somebody would snitch, but of course, if you got your neighbors in on it, you could get away with it. Also, we had a bee farm, and a portion of the bees, the honey, had to be given back to the Communists. They would send someone who would collect the honey, and they would leave us a small portion.

Did this bee farm precede the time of the Soviet occupation? I mean was this something that …?

It was already there, but that wasn't our bee farm. It was rented by somebody else. He used our land for that. We also had nuts. We grew nuts, too. That too, a portion had to be given to the Communists.

What else did your parents grow on the farm?

Potatoes, wheat, those were the primary. Wheat and potatoes were the primary things.

Do you remember the outbreak of war in September 1939?

No, no. When parents listened to the wireless, they usually made sure you weren't there. The children didn't hear it or know that they're listening because you were afraid. Children go to school; children talk on the streets, children tell each other. You didn't let the children know these things. It was safer that way. That's why, to me, that wireless was a magic box. I didn't know how you can get a voice out of that.

You described going to school. You began going to school under the Soviets in the fall of 1939. Besides telling you where your candy was coming from, what else did they teach you?

I don't remember anything else. I remember portraits of Stalin being in the classrooms, that I remember. Oh, yes, I remember when the Communists would come into town, and they would be walking in the road in front of our house. We were given orders, I don't know by whom, though. We had little red flags, and you had to put them every so often on the fence to welcome, the red flags were to welcome the Communists who visit the town, that I remember. And I remember my father saying something like, 'Are they gone?' And he'd run out and pick up all the red flags, and hide them for the next time that we're told to put out the red flags.

Did you see Soviet Army troops?

Marching, mm-hmm, in front of our house, yup.

And how did they behave?

As if they were our saviors. As if they were – I never saw any -- they never terrorized us. There was nothing like that. They rode their horses, with their chins high. I was terrified of their boots and shoes because they were shiny. I never saw shiny shoes on a farm. We never saw shined shoes.

Muddy would be the word.

Muddy, yeah. To this day, I still have a fear of boots, high shiny boots like policemen wear. I'm not alone, I know a lot of other survivors that are scared of high, shiny boots.

For the sound that they make.

Click, click, yes.

How was your mother taking these changes? We talked a little bit about your father.

You mean at that time, what was happening?

Yes, in 1938, 1939, 1940?

My mother, I don't remember her doing anything but working, working, working right alongside of my father. And then, of course, family matters. She was a very family oriented woman. We did have hired help. When a new baby would be born, my mother would get a lovely Ukrainian girl that was very friendly to us. She would come, take care of the baby so that my mother could work the fields with my father. And then she would disappear until the next baby's born. And then the same girl would come back, and she was very nice to us. She was a very gentle lady, a young girl, she wasn't a woman yet, she was a girl. But she was older then the rest of us, so to us she seemed like a lady. But I don't remember a childhood really on the farm. I worked from the day I was born. I always felt like I was a mother, always, I don't remember anything else. I was always taking care of somebody. I always had to be very grown up.

So you were kind of a baby sitter since your mother was working on the farm much of the time?

Yeah.

Would you call your mother strict?

Never, no, no. My father, yes. There's a Polish expression that the man is the king of the house, but the woman is the crown, so she is above him.

So she is above him.

In a very nice way, right?

Uhm, did you have any pets other than your famous horse?

Yes, yes, we had dogs. As a matter of fact, when we ran from our farm, the dog had puppies. Oh, and I was so upset, what will become, because the whole village was burned. That means if she wasn't smart enough to drag those puppies from under the shed, they would perish.

When was your village burned?

Late summer of 1943. We had horses, cows, lots of cows, pigs, sheep. It was a regular farm. Now, from what I understand from relatives, our farm was a very thriving farm. My father was very knowledgeable about farming, and he really was very devoted to his land. That land in Wolyn, the soil is very black, it is a very rich soil, it's a farmers dream to till such soil. And my father recognized that even then, that that is good, rich soil. We can live on land like that, and we did. We were not wealthy, but we were never hungry, ever. There was always some fruit, there were some nuts, there was honey. There was all kinds of ways of fixing potatoes. There were leftover scraps of meat. My mother would dream up these concoctions, and we thought it was heaven.

So as far as you knew you were not missing out on anything?

Nothing, we were fine.

Were you old enough to have dreams, that is, dreams of what you would do when you grew up?

No, I never had dreams like that.

When is the first time you saw Germans?

Well, when we run from our village, from our farm, in 1943. The village was burned to the ground and butchered by the Ukrainians, who wanted, from what I understand now, the land that we were on. We were the minority in Wolyn. All summer long, we would sleep out on the fields, because we knew they were determined to kill us and burn the village. But this one summer night, we decided to sleep in our beds, and that's the night that it happened.

Our neighbor came to our window and quickly rapped on our bedroom window, waking us all. He said, 'Wictor, Wictor, they are burning our village, this is the night.' We just jumped out of the bed. There was no time to find clothes. In the dark, you couldn't put lights on, you couldn't light a candle or anything. We ran out the door, and we could already look back and see the village burning. You could hear the crackle, the homes collapsing already in the fire. We ran through the wheat, through the forest, heading for Grandma's house.

We thought that from that end of the village, maybe we could get to Grandma and Grandpa and everyone there, and warn them and run together. But it wasn't like that. By the time we reached Grandma, that end of the village started to burn too. So we headed in another direction. While we were running, my father had the bright idea that he'd like to go back to the farm, and let all the animals out of the barns because he had visions that we'd return to the land again. So we didn't know if he was safe, because he ran back. He told us to keep running towards the river. Then, as we were running towards the river and realized he's not behind us, we didn't know – continue or wait for him, what? My mother said, "'Keep running, don't stop.'" So we're running and running and running, and behind us there's a man following us. And my mother grabbed the youngest child who was almost three, and she told us, 'Hold on to each other, don't let go, and run as fast as you can'. As we were running, the man behind us is calling my mother's name 'Janka, Janka, Janka…' My mother is so frightened, because many people knew us in the village, not just Poles, but Ukrainians knew us to.

Well, we were running as fast as we could, and it was my father. He caught up to us, but in the dark, in the moonlit night, you couldn't tell. Eventually, we reached the river, and we went to the forest near the river, and we spent the rest of the night hoping Grandma was okay. We were very close to her house. Morning came. We all decided that we have to move on. We can't stay here, it's daylight, because they'll come looking for us.

The Ukrainians?

Yes, they'll come looking for us to finish us off. So we crossed the river, and in the river, as we were crossing, there was a teenage girl from the village, with a dog, a big German shepherd. And that dog barked and barked and barked. And she was still in the water, and she was begging us, "'Please, please Mr. Urbonowicz, please take me with you.'" And there were lots of people. We weren't alone. There were many other villagers with families. They had a conference, all the grown-ups there at the river, and they decided not to take her along. They asked her to leave the dog because he'll give us away with that barking. She wouldn't. She chose to stay with the dog. And we continued, and we crossed the river into the clearing.

This was the Bug [ph245] River?

Bug [ph245] River, yeah. And when we crossed the river, heading for my aunt's house, we stood up. And the field was open, no trees. The shots started to ring out. The Ukrainians or someone was waiting for us to stand up and show ourselves. So we all hit the dirt, and we crossed on all fours into the next patch of woods into the forest.

There, we went to my aunt Leocadia's house. The house was empty, no one was there. We got frightened, we started to walk away. Near her house was a pond, it was mud at this point. As we were walking out of her house by the pond, bodies stood up covered with mud. My God, we thought, this is it for us, all of us. We're finished now. That was my aunt and my uncle and their children. They were hiding in the pond. When we knew they were okay, we went to another aunt's house across the road to see if she's okay.

There, the chicken and geese were running over the house. The front gate was swinging. But they had children our age, so my mother thought she could get clothes for us and dresses, because we were only in our nightshirts and barefoot. My mother dressed us, and my father said he was going back to the farm to see. My father loved his land. He had to go back to see if it's okay for us to return. And he was gone a long time. My mother got nervous. She decides to go find him. She leaves us lying on the cot there, and she goes.

She told us that when she got to the farm, there was nothing standing. She didn't see Wictor either. She didn't know what to do. She knew we were hungry, so she grabbed a chicken by the head, and decided she's going to take the chicken back to us, and we'll have dinner. As she's running with this chicken, holding the chicken by its neck, there's a man running after her. She got so scared, she dropped the chicken and ran fast. But it was my father. He recognized her again.

Two cases of mistaken identity in one week.

This is fright, this is fright you know. By then, my mother found some clothes for us, and we started to go deeper into Poland. We walked into Tuczyn that was where Mr. Friedman lived. We stopped at Friedman's. We did that often at Friedman's house, because he lived close to our church. So we often stopped and shook the sand from our shoes and continued to our church, which was just a stone's throw away from him.

In Friedman's house, we were told to lie down and rest. Mr. and Mrs. Friedman took my mother and father to the kitchen, but they didn't close the door. And I being the oldest, and I wasn't that tired, I heard what they were saying. And my father was pleading with Mr. Friedman to leave the town and run. "'Don't stay here." And Friedman said, "'No, this is my home, this is my land, and I am staying.'" And we left them there in that house, standing in the doorway, and bidding us farewell.

And Mr. Friedman was Jewish?

He was Jewish. They were friends that my father dealt with in the market.

How had he managed to survive two years of German occupation?

No, he did, he did.

Not in hiding?

No, no, no.

The Ukrainians when they were burning your village, did they discriminate between Ukrainian and Polish homes?

We didn't see a difference. The whole village was burning. I don't know. The whole village was down to the ground, nothing remained. When my father ran back to see if any of our livestock

was returned to the barns, or anything, nothing was standing. The brick schoolhouse, my father said, remained standing. But everything else was leveled. Nothing. You wouldn't recognize one house from another that stood there. You wouldn't know.

Would you know where they got their weapons?

No, most of the arms, they were knives, that kind – most.

So they didn't have firearms?

We heard firearms, but I know for a fact that most of their arms – they were butchering people – that's why we use that expression. They were butchering because that is exactly what they were doing. They would slit your throat or stab you.

This was a very primitive operation?

Very primitive, yeah. But when we left Friedman, we decided to go deeper into Poland. There were throngs of us by then on the road, with nap sacks, pushing baby carriages, homeless people like us.

Fleeing the same?

That's right.

For two years you lived under German occupation?

Soviet, Soviet that part of, that part, not German yet, I was still…

So this was still before 1941?

That's right. Now in 1943, I was still under the Soviet occupation, that part of … we didn't see anything different. There was no difference there. When we left the farm and ran, we ran right into the arms of the Nazis now.

I'm saying that period between 1941 when the Nazis took over your area and then in 1943 when Soviets are returning, did you have any experience that's…?

No difference. No, we didn't see the difference there.

No difference?

No! I didn't see German soldiers.

No German soldiers, no atrocities?

No, nothing.

So the first atrocity that you experienced was at the hands of those Ukrainians?

That was first, yes. That was first.

In 1943, and this is what drives you deeper into Poland, and when you first run into Nazis?

That's right, and there were throngs of people with knapsacks, and we didn't know which way to go. And we marched right into the arms of the Nazis in Poland. I didn't know what city or what town this was in, but when we arrived, it was getting towards the evening and the Nazis had told us that they'll put us up in this abandoned school building or something, or railroad station. It was just a building really, a big building. As a matter of fact, we couldn't even get inside the building, there were too many people. We wound up sleeping on the outside. But the Germans told us that the Ukrainians, they frightened us really, now I see. They told us that they are "'going to come back tonight to finish you off. We will give you arms. You can defend yourselves.'"

The Germans are going to help you to defend yourselves?

Against the Ukrainians. This is what they told us the adults, yes. They are going to defend us. In the morning, they made us an offer, the Germans, we couldn't refuse. They did come to attack us, by the way, all night long.

The Ukrainians?

Oh, yes, oh, yes. There was shooting all night long, bullets whizzing past our ears, because we weren't inside the building, we couldn't get in, it was too crowded. In the morning, the Germans told us that we can go to Germany, that we'll have a place to live, we'll have a job, we'll be warm, and we'll have food. What else could we do? We couldn't go back. We didn't know what was really happening in Germany.

Wagons came very quickly; this was done very, very fast. The cattle cars arrived. I had never seen a train in my life. I thought cattle cars were the only way to travel. What did I know? No one ever showed me any other way. They rounded up the people and they very quickly pushed us into the wagons. There were too many people, so we ended up standing shoulder to shoulder. In a cattle car, there's no windows, just slits on top, elongated kinds of slits. And you couldn't breathe when there're so many people. And there were no facilities.

We traveled, I think, two nights or two days a night, I don't remember. I was only about eight and a half. I don't remember food or water being given, I'm sure there was some at some point. I know that mothers were crying because they had no room. They wanted to nurse their babies; they couldn't. There was no room.

When we arrived finally in Freiburg, Germany and the doors slid open, I knew we left people behind, but I didn't know that they were dead. There were babies, there were old people. They

just fell down when we started to file out from the wagons. They probably died standing up, because there wasn't enough room to lie down. They quickly put us into an abandoned building in Freiburg (Freiburg im Breisgau), where my mother and father worked in a leather factory, making things for the Nazi troops. Children worked in a field. I can't remember what we did in that field, though. Did we pick potatoes, plant potatoes? I can't remember a thing. I just remember walking and being very, very cold, and picking up rocks from the field.

This would have been late summer, fall?

Late summer, fall, yes, yes, as soon as we got there.

So it would be harvest time?

We were doing something. I know now why I don't remember, because I started to get sick with TB. And my mother begged one of the guards in the factory to get some medical attention for me. Now, we were still not in the normal type of slave labor camp. They were just keeping us there for factory work. Later, they started to divide us, and sending us wherever Germany needed slave labor. By the time the German guard offered to help me, I was very, very sick already. I was semi-conscious by then.

He came in a little black car like a Volkswagen, and he took me to a hospital. I remember riding with him, and I saw a gray building that I thought would be a hospital, and I was impressed that I'm going to be in that beautiful, beautiful kind of a building. But that was not for people like me. That was a German hospital. Far away from that hospital, he told me later, that that was for Polish swine. And that's where they kept people like me. I remember lying in that hospital. And my mother said years later that she came to visit me. But I didn't know really that she snuck out from that place somehow and got to the hospital.

I remember that I was very sick and I thought I was dreaming that my mother was sitting next to me and stroking my hand and talking sweet, you know, like mothers do. But I thought I was dreaming, so I wouldn't open my eyes. I thought if I open my eyes, the dream would stop. So I never opened my eyes, and my mother died never knowing that I knew that she was there. But I didn't want to open my eyes.

I was in the hospital, my mother said, three to four months. It was very cold, but it was drawing close to spring when another guard came to bring me back to my mother. But he didn't come in a car this time, he came on a bicycle. And it was cold, and I was holding on to the handlebars. I was sitting on the handlebars, holding on. And I remember the road still having patches of snow. But it was thaw already, and it was mud, and the bicycle was constantly splashing mud all over my legs. When we got to the building where they kept us, I couldn't get my hands off the handlebars. I thought they froze to the handlebars. He had to help me get my fingers straightened out. My mother begged them, if they'd only let me rest a little bit and they said no, I had to go back to the field with the other children.

At this point, my hair was already shaved, because I was infested with lice. All of us were. My hair was just growing back. I had to wear a beret. Somebody gave me a hat. But when I returned

from the hospital, I had no shoes. My shoes were stolen, so I had to wrap rags around my feet. We slept with our shoes under our pillows, that's how bad it was. No one had shoes.

What did they feed you?

In this particular camp, they had the ugliest soup ever. It was soup made out of cherries. I hated that. It was sweet-sour. I didn't remember anything but that soup, and there was vegetable that they gave us, like turnip. That was an over abundance. I don't remember milk. Maybe we did get it. I don't remember seeing milk there.

How about sleeping conditions?

Sleeping, we slept, this building, there were no beds. We slept on a floor. Whatever we brought with us, belongings, clothes for a pillow, or if you happened to have a blanket, you covered all your children with one blanket. That's why we were so lice-infested there, because we were on top of each other.

Was the family allowed to stay together?

Yes, at this point, yes.

So there was segregation based on gender?

No, no.

Which kind people were in this camp? Were they all from your town, village?

No, strangers, strangers at this point. But from what I remember, we were all Poles at this place.

All Poles?

We all spoke Polish, I don't remember hearing any other language there.

No Ukrainians?

No, I didn't hear it, no. In the end of the spring, beginning of the summer, wagons came and trucks and all of us had to quickly get out, get into these trucks, and they drove us to a slave labor camp. We didn't know what a slave labor camp was, in Chemnitz. This was a whole different story. Chemnitz had tall fence, it had a wire on the top, and it was located between the railroad tracks and a munitions factory, where my mother and father worked.

My father's job was loading torpedoes onto a truck that hauled them away to I don't know where. My mother worked in that factory with a Ukrainian woman, and they became best of friends, these two women. Now, in this camp, it was all different. It was organized. We had other nationalities, we had French in there, we had Ukrainians, we had gypsies. And I never

knew what a gypsy was. I thought gypsies only read tarot cards. They were nice people, you know, but I thought that's all gypsies did.

Could they tell fortunes?

No, no they were just like rest of us. But like I said. there were French, there were Russian women there, there were children, many, many children. We were forbidden to look towards the railroad tracks, but I was curious, and I did look. I thought I could see something that would look like human beings, but there were never any people at the train station. I never saw people. I knew trains stopped there, because I could hear the screech of the wheels coming to a stop. They picked up something or delivered something.

In this camp, we stayed from sometime from 1944 summer, late spring, to the end of the war almost. My mother in Chemnitz somehow wrote a letter to her brother who was working as a slave laborer at a German farm. Now, how my mother managed this, I don't know. She wrote a letter…

How she managed to write the letter, how she managed to know that her brother was…?

Yes, how did she know? I never learned this from my mother. How did she know where to send this letter? She wrote a letter and put three leaves of tobacco, because he was a chain smoker. And don't ask me where she got the tobacco. I don't know how these people managed these things. They must barter somehow in the camp. Somebody must have had it. And in the letter, she said something to the effect that it won't be long now when the children will be finished off first, because of the food, the lack of food. And the letter was thick. It was censored. They opened the letter, and they quickly arrested my father. My mother signed the letter with the initial "J" for Janina. And somehow, in their haste, they thought it was my father who wrote the letter. They came and arrested my father. They interrogated him all night, beat him something terrible, because he didn't know anything, and they insisted he did.

They showed my father in the morning the letter, and when he saw my mother's initial without realizing he said, "'But that's Janka's letter.'" But he was so beaten at this point, he didn't know what he was saying anymore.

So he incriminated your mother?

Yeah, I'm sure…

It's interesting that a prisoner could be arrested, because in effect, he's a prisoner already.

Yes, you were already a prisoner, right? But they came when they realized their mistake in the morning. They brought my father back, and they took my mother. And I remember my mother and my father passing each other, and my father said to her, "'Janka, we now have real trouble.'" And my mother whispered to me that she hid nine German marks, money, under the mattress.

She said, "'If you need it, use it'". You know, very thrifty woman, she salvaged nine marks, and hid them in a mattress, for some day.

It seems the reason my mother was really in trouble, not only because of that letter, but the Ukrainian woman that she worked with made a suit for her boyfriend out of a gray blanket, and he escaped. That was a successful escape. There were other successful escapes. The Germans thought that there was a Polish or some underground working inside the camp. And my mother and this Ukrainian girl, they worked shoulder to shoulder, so they must know something. They're probably part of it. That woman maybe was, but my mother definitely wasn't. So, they arrested my mother and that woman too.

My mother and she were terribly beaten to reveal names of others. There were no others to reveal, and the more they denied, the more they were beaten. Both women were then sent -- this is already pushing towards the end of 1944 -- both women eventually were sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp. My mother in the camp, she was sterilized so she would never have – they way they put it to her -- so there would be no more Polish bastards born in the world. That's what they told her.

Tape 1 Side B

Never, never, never discussed, she could be a Polish or a German Jew but it was something the women protected. They protected each other like that, they knew.

Did your mother wear a uniform?

She did.

What kind of badge or emblem did she have on?

She had her red triangle, red triangle with letter P.

Red triangle, political?

Red triangle with a "P", with a "P". I don't know her number. The reason we found, tracing my mother's number, her batch of numbers, could have been destroyed when Germans were destroying all records, when the front was approaching. We had found some other women who also lost, who were there with friends. Friends' numbers survived, records, and some women you can't find. This is something we found in Poland very often. We met three women. One was only listed, she said. We went through the camp together, the two other women, their records were destroyed.

But going back to my mother, she did spent time in the hospital, Revier, in Ravensbruck. She told us stories that you could only stay in the hospital three days. If you didn't get better, you were administered a lethal shot. She said her friends had falsified her papers that hang over your bed. Someone had died, and they hung someone else's papers, switching, because if her original papers that she had come in there with three days ago stayed there, and she didn't get better and

leave the bed, she would have received her lethal shot. So they switched papers somehow, so she could stay another day or two, when she could be stronger and walk out. My mother was always determined that she would not go "'through the chimney.'" That was a favorite expression. That's what gave them hope. That was not the way she's going to die, just as her friend was. They're not going to go through the chimney.

Eventually, there was a German guard when my mother was in the solitary, there was a German guard who came one time to my mother with a little jar of vaseline. And, he said mater of factly to her, "'My wife feels sorry for you. She sent you this Vaseline.'" My mother said it was a blessing and a curse, because she couldn't show the vaseline to any of her friends, her inmates, because they would fight for it and take it away from her. She couldn't let anyone see it, because she'd be accused maybe of stealing it someplace. She slept with it under her armpit or between her legs.

What did she do with it when she worked?

I have no idea what she did. Did she have a pocket, did she have underwear, did she stick it someplace else? But she said this is what she had to do to make sure that they didn't steal that little jar of vaseline. You couldn't go to sleep with possessions like that.

Was she able to use it?

She did, she did, while she was in solitary, she did. She was alone. But when she came out, she went out to the barrack. But eventually, they send her from Ravensbruck to Gross-Rosen, where she worked in the stone quarry. But we remained in Chemnitz, the family, until spring of 1945. There weren't that many of us that survived. We were thinned out by then. We weren't as crowded anymore.

What did you do, what was an average day like for you?

For children?

Yes.

There were German women who took charge of the children while the adults worked in the factory. They taught us the glories of the Third Reich. They taught us how to knit scarves. We thought the scarves were for us, because winter was approaching. They were for their own children for Christmas presents. They confiscated all these green little scarves, and took them home for Christmas presesents for their own families.

I know at one point there, when my mother was gone, I lost all interest in my appearance, and it was very important to the Germans that we be very neat and clean, and our hair be combed. But when my mother was arrested, and I became the mother in the family, I lost interest in things. And one time I was sitting at a long bench with my brother and sisters, and I guess I wasn't very clean, or my hair wasn't combed, I don't know, but she grabbed me and she slapped me because I was dirty. She called me a dirty Pole and I fell, I was so surprised, I fell, I lost my balance and

fell down. And she even kicked me once so the children would know that it's very important that we listen and that we stay neat and clean. I remember one time there was no food, and I went to the dump behind the kitchen there. There was a dump, and I found apple peels and potato peels. I was in heaven. I thought potato peels. I thought, I hadn't seen a potato in so long. I brought the potatoes to the barrack, and the women were beside themselves with joy. How are we going to cook these? We want to have potatoes. We want to taste potatoes. And somehow they cooked the potatoes. I don't know how. I remember eating them, and they were full of sand. I don't think they washed them very well.

But in 1944, in the spring, I suppose the front was approaching. The wagons came and trucks and they told us to take our belongings, and get into the wagons. They took us to the outskirts of the city. They dumped all of us on the sidewalk. We still had several hundred people. And no one told us what this was all about. When we were all on the sidewalk, the German guards lined us up with guns, and told us to march and find the American front. We didn't know which way to go. They told us not to turn back because they were going to shoot. We had too many belongings. We started to leave things on the sidewalk. We started to walk in the direction they pointed, towards the forest.

As we started to wind our way through the city into the open field and head into the forest, some German people came out they whispered to us to stay on the road not to go into the fields because the fields are mined. We stayed on the road for days. We traveled for days. We slept in the forest. We slept in abandoned railroad cars. Sometimes, we would sneak into a German barn if it was dark, and we could do that without anyone noticing, if the dogs didn't bark. At this point, people started breaking up into different units. Everybody had their own idea which way to find the American front.

You had no escorts, no guards?

No, nothing, they just let us go loose into the German population.

Was your father with you?

Yes, my mother was already in the Ravensbruck, there were four of us.

So your father was your guide, so to speak?

Yes, he was, but the German people were afraid of us they would ___ when we beg for food, they would ___, and then they would ask to spend the night in their shed or barn or something, they would say "'nay'" no, there were afraid.

You were full of lice?

We were dirty, you have to remember, we were the people that they were taught to hate. Eventually, we did find the American front. When we converged in this one place, the Americans didn't know what to do with all of us. There were so many of us, every day a new group of people arriving. Where do you house all these people? Eventually, we wound up in an

old abandoned schoolhouse, I think. The Americans sent us by mistake into German schools. We had lost a few years of schooling. The German children ridiculed us. They called us a Polish swine, and I remember someone called me a Polish bandit, a Polish bandit. I thought to myself, I have never done anything to be called a bandit. How did this happen? I'm a swine and a bandit. That was such a puzzlement to us. We couldn't figure this out.

Did you even know what a bandit was?

No, I knew it was something bad, "bandyta" in Polish, I know what that is. How did these children consider me a swine and a bandit? What did I ever do? They were dressed beautifully, these children. We were in rags. They made fun of our clothes. They had made fun of our names too, so when the Americans realized what was happening, they quickly took us out of these schools and they formed local schools within our group. There were teachers there. At one point, we even had a priest that survived. He was with us, a Polish priest. We stayed in this one building for few months, and then it got overcrowded, and by mistake, somehow, they shipped us to Buchenwald concentration camp.

The Americans shipped you to Buchenwald?

There were beds there. No one really knew how bad it was. I am sure no one knew. When we got to Buchenwald, and we saw what had happened in Buchenwald, they quickly took us out of there too. And they brought us to a place, a Displaced Person (DP) camp at this point. Then I learned a name for this place, a DP camp. There were hundreds and hundreds of us, and the American took care of us, there was an organization called UNRA, United Nations Relief Agency, I think, and they tried to send us back where we belonged. Where did we want to go? My father wouldn't go back to Poland. He was afraid because he had a prison record there, and he was positive that that record still existed, and he wouldn't go back. And he wouldn't take us children back, even though we had thought my mother perished, and my mother thought we had perished, even though the slightest chance that my mother was alive; she might be in Poland. Even that wouldn't make my father want to go back there. He was that afraid, so…

Now Poland meaning…?

Communist Poland, yes.

Yeah, or worse. The Russian, the area that you had come from, was that still part of Poland at the end of the war?

I don't think so, not any more. But he wouldn't go back. He had very bad memories.

Now his prison record, you say he had a prison record in Poland, this was not under the Polish government, was it? This was under the Communist government.

Communists, right. And later, he told u she was also afraid someone might snitch on him for other activities. We were hiding people by the river. We don't know if anyone snitched ever on us. Did he spend time for some of that, too? I don't think he should have, but we don't know.

As a prisoner of the Germans, did he get to wear a prison uniform with a triangle?

My father? No, not in a slave labor camp, no.

And you continued to wear your usual rags?

Your own rags, yes. There were no uniforms for us in that camp, no.

Do you know where and when you were liberated by the Americans?

Spring of 1945.

You don't know the month or the date?

Mm, mm.

And the town where you were?

I think we were in Leipzig.

And the DP camp?

That's what I'm thinking of, the DP camp was in Leipzig.

But you were liberated somewhere else, not far from Leipzig?

Not far, no, very close, because this was very fast moving, so we couldn't have been very far from each place. But when, UNRA located relatives in New York, and told them that we survived the war, they sponsored us, and passports and birth certificates had to be made very quickly. And in that same DP camp, we were there till January 1947 in that DP camp, from 1945 till the beginning of 1947. We had our own little schools. They tried to teach children reading, writing, math. We even made holy communion. There was priest there who taught us religion after the war. Three of us, three out of the four children received holy communion. And we had Polish scouts, I remember. I was very impressed. I was already a teenager, 12 by then, 12 and a half I was. I was terribly impressed that Polish people even had scouts.

When was the last time you attended church?

Oh, my God, from 1943 to 1947, I had no regular church, no. We prayed, but no church. Holy communion, they made a make-shift church for us for holy communion in the DP camp.

Your schooling at the DP camp, was that in English, German, or Polish?

Polish. It was still Polish. Yeah, but we all spoke German at this point already. Even when I came here, I was able to speak German. You just pick up these things. Children pick up very

quickly. And my father and mother, they could speak Russian, German, Ukrainian, Polish. They could jump back and forth between these languages.

When did you realize that your mother was alive?

We came to America in early 1947, and my mother, when she was sent to Gross-Rosen, that is the rock quarry slave labor camp to work there. She with her Ukrainian best friend, again, when the front was approaching, they didn't know it was. Something was changing at Gross-Rosen. My mother noticed that the guards were not beating the women, they were almost kind. So my mother said to her friend, "'I am going to run for it tonight when it gets dark.'" And the woman says, "'I'm going with you.'" So my mother sat until dark and they went for the gate. The gate opened when they pushed. There were no sirens, no dogs, no search lights. The two women froze for a second, and then took to their heels, and ran into the forest. They spent two to three days sleeping in the forest in dampness, until both were burning with a fever. So they decided that they're going to enter the first house and ask for help.

When they went to this one house, it was still dark. Lights were on inside, the door opened, and a man sees these two women in striped uniforms, with very short hair. He gets scared, he doesn't know what to do, so he calls his wife. His wife comes in, and she sees the two women, and she pulls them in quickly, and closes the door so no neighbors would see them standing there. And she took pity on my mother and her friend, and she said, "'You could spend time up in the attic, but don't walk, because the ceiling creeks.'" So my mother said they were there two, three days until the fever subsided. The woman fed them. She took a tremendous risk, and her neighbors could have reported her that she took in two prisoners.

One day, my mother hears tanks approaching the house. The roar was getting louder and louder, and closer and closer they came. She thought that that was the end for both of them. As they got closer to the house, she recognized the language they were speaking, and it was Russian. They were being liberated by the Soviet troops. And of course, the two women ran down, and the Soviet troops opened their arms, and welcomed them. They were very happy to find two of them alive.

They were taken after that, my mother said, to some holding camp, where in this camp they were told they can either go back to Poland or to Russia. My mother, hoping we would be in Poland, went to Poland. In Poland, my mother gets impatient to find us; are we dead or alive? So she pieced an address, part of an address, and wrote something to a relative in Detroit, who knew somebody in New York who knew us, who found us. This is by this point is 1949. They find us in New York. We start corresponding. My mother gets anxious to come to the United States. She applies for a visa. The visa is denied by the Communists because she is too young, she was then 39. They need young people to rebuild Poland. We're corresponding furiously back and forth. My mother gets very impatient to come. She joins the Polish underground in Poland. She tries to cross the border, on the water somehow. They were picked up off the water, three men and two women, by a Russian trawler. And my mother winds up in prison again. While she's sitting in prison, her visa does come up, but she doesn't know it.

She told her sister when she joined the underground -- she didn't tell her sister that she was joining the underground -- all she told her sister in Poland was, "'If I am in trouble, I will send you a post card and the stamp will be upside down. That means I am in trouble.'" That's all she said, and she took off one night, without explaining anything. But when she finally came out of prison and reapplied for her visa from the Communists, they told her you can't leave the country, because you have a prison record. And this is like 1950, 1951 already. She came in1957 to America.

How did she pull that?

The visa came through; they took pity on her, finally.

The Gomulka regime.

The Gomulka regime, that's right, that's right. She came on August 15, 1957. I was a married lady, my sister was married.

It's a Holy Day.

That's right, you remembered, good boy.

Boy? (laughter)

And we picked her up at. I remember picking her up at LaGuardia. I don't know why LaGuardia sticks out in my head. But I only had like a week's notice that she was coming. That's how quickly. A telegram arrived, that's it, "'Meet me at LaGuardia.'" I went there with my husband. I didn't recognize her. I was looking for a different kind of woman, the woman that I remembered. This is more than 15 years later. It wasn't anything what I expected, and I wasn't what she expected.

Was your father still around?

He was. He didn't come to the airport with us. He couldn't do it. Emotionally, he just couldn't do it.

Where did your mother stay during these years in Poland?

She knew her sister; this was Klodzko, Poland.

So she did not return to her hometown?

No, not that way, no, the opposite almost, the opposite end of Poland, near the German border, the Czechoslovakian border, I think.

And when did you know that she was alive through all of this?

In about 1949…

So when she applied for the visa, she knew you were in America?

Oh yes, she knew. That's way she applied for the visa then. Piecing little bits and pieces of the address that she remembered in her head.

So all those years you thought that she was dead?

Oh yeah, yeah**…**

And when you had left her in…when was that?

That was in about the end of 1944.

That is when she left you?

Yes, we were separated.

In Ravensbruck, that was the good bye…

Yes, that was last time.

Did she get a chance to say goodbye to you then?

No, they were hustling her very fast. I'm sure no one thought it was a goodbye. I don't think anyone thought that way at that time, mm mm. Sometimes people ask about our childhood. There was no childhood for people like us. There was nothing.

So when did you reach adulthood, 1943?

Probably, probably when everything -- I was the mother, definitely in the European tradition, the oldest child takes the place of the parent that's not there. I was the mother. When my mother arrived in New York, I was married, my sister was married, my brother was courting seriously a young girl, Polish girl. My youngest sister, the baby, who was pushing 19 already, 18, 19, she was getting ready to leave and go to the convent.

My mother found four adults, not children. She didn't understand why we celebrated birthdays, not feast days, because in Poland at that time we celebrated the saints. She couldn't understand why we do that. She couldn't understand Thanksgiving, why would you celebrate a turkey. Didn't make sense. We spoke English amongst ourselves. That hurt my mother, I know it did. A lot of things -- we never, really, really bounded after that. Now that I'm mother and a grandma, I understand. We never, never bonded after that. There was something torn, lost forever. That childhood bonding that occurs in normal average families never returned to us. It was different, and I'm sure my mother felt it until the day she died.

She used to say, "'I welcome death, that's okay, that's okay.'" She was always disappointed that people did that to people, what she saw, people did it to people, and that bothered her always, that she had to witness. And I found out my mother would talk about her experience. That's why I know so much more, because I asked, and I kept a journal of things she said. My father had nightmares till the day he died. He would not talk. If we talked about the Holocaust, he would hear the subject beginning in the room, and he would walk out of the room. He wouldn't stay. He'd go and lie down, and for good measure, he would put the pillow over his head, turn towards the wall, and want nothing to do with us. And he had endured a lot. He could have told us the stories how he had to take care of four children. What were his thoughts, trying to shelter and keep these children alive? Never talked.

Whom do you think suffered the most, your mother, you, your father?

I think my mother. She was alone. We were together, four children and a father. We stayed together. But she was separated all by herself.

As a prisoner in a sense.

Yeah.

The Ukrainian friend was no substitute.

Well, it's good to have a friend, you know. She remained with that woman to the end. And then, when they were liberated, each went her own way.

Do you know when and where she was liberated?

No.

Somewhere outside Gross-Rosen by Russian troops in the spring of 1945.

Yes.

What was the worst experience for you during these years?

I think when I heard in Germany after the war that -- I heard that they burned people and that they put their ashes in jars and labeled the jars. I wanted to find a place like that with jars so that I could be convinced that she's alive or she's dead. It used to haunt me, that story that I heard about the jars of ashes, and that the Germans labeled them so meticulously.

So the fear, the suspicion that your mother was dead, that was the worst?

This was at the end, already. We were liberated, but in the camp itself, it wasn't the lack of food that was hurting the most, it's the separation from the mother. And then you know the father would be working all day in the factory, and I was never sure if he would come back home either. And you would be there all day without mother, without father. These German women

making fun of you and teaching you things that you didn't know why they were teaching you these things. What is our future? Why are you teaching me all these things, what for?

How did you view the Germans?

At that time, I was confused. I knew they were bad, but I didn't know why. No one told us. See, I thought throughout the war, when I heard grownups talking, I thought that Hitler hated people, and he hated Poles. I didn't know at that time yet anything about the fate of the Jews. That wasn't discussed in front of us children, ever.

Did you know any Jews when you were growing up?

In the village, yes, but I didn't know they were Jews. I found out later that these people -- I thought they were just Poles, because they spoke Polish. No, I never knew the difference.

There were no Jewish collective farmers?

No, I didn't see anything like that. When I came to America, I heard, when we lived in Brooklyn, our first place, adults talking at the kitchen table, and my father saying, "'My god, my god, I should have seen what they were doing to the Jews.'" And I thought to myself, the Jews, and then I heard it again, "'to the Jews'". I said to myself, how come no one says what they were doing to us, too? And that was my first experience that Hitler was out to destroy all the Jews. And I was already in America when I learned this. We were never told these things.

And this was from your father…?

From my father, yes.

Who, really -- did he even see what Hitler was doing to the Jews?

He saw. I saw Hitler in a parade someplace when we were in Germany. He was in a sidecar of a motorcycle. I was very impressed with the way they were marching in this parade.

You literally saw him?

I saw him.

This was when you were in…

This was sometime in 1943. It wasn't in 1943, it was sometime in 1944. We were being transported from this Freiburg (Freiburg im Breisgau) to another camp, and there was a parade going. And we had to stop because of throngs and throngs of people. We got off the wagons and we were standing, trying to see what was going on. My father lifted me, and my father said, "'You see that, that's Hitler.'" I had no idea who Hitler was. All I remember is, he stood there

and he was doing his "'Heil Hitler!'" Who is that person? I had no idea. Years later, my father reminded me of that. I had no idea.

But this is Hitler on parade, not for killing people?

Parade – oh no, no, no on parade, no, no, no. This was people screaming and shouting. And I had no idea who this famous or infamous person was at that time.

No, I was referring to your father's remark, "'You should have seen what they were doing to the Jews.'" The fact is, he wasn't even seeing the worst…

Himself. He still, he felt sorry for what they were doing to the Jews. That's why he was saying, "'My god, my god, you should see what they were doing to the Jews.'" But my father died peacefully. My mother died in her sleep.

You will never know what their most terrifying experience was.

There were so many, my father story? I can only tell you what his nightmare. I can tell you to the day he died, he used to beat the wall with his fists and scream. And he was always dreaming that the Ukrainians were killing him; that they were successful; they butchering. He told us this, this was from his lips. That was his most horrible nightmare. He was so afraid of being killed that way.

And as it turned out, they took his farm.

They took his farm. They were happy, I suppose. They took the farm, they got what they wanted.

And your most terrifying experience during the war?

I think bombs falling, probably. When the sirens go off, you don't know where to hide your head. Usually, when the sirens would go off, because we were between the railroad tracks and the munitions factory, so the Allies were trying to bomb one or the other. I didn't know where to run. We had no mother. My father couldn't come and grab us quick enough. Where do four children run? Where do we hide? That was scary, when there was no one to look after us, no one.

And you didn't know whose bombs they were?

No we didn't know, no.

And it probably would not have occurred to you that these were friendly bombs.

No. I remember one time, planes came and leaflets were dropped. The whole area was covered with some kind of leaflet. I heard them talking later that the leaflets said something – that "'Hitler give up, you never win this war.'" But who dropped these leaflets, I have no idea. No one ever told us. So I don't know where they came from. Was it the British or -- I have no idea, no idea.

When did you, your father, since he was the brains of the family, at this point, realize that the end was in sight, that this will not go on forever, this prison?

I think, when they threw us from the city. They said go. They didn't know what to do with us.

So very late?

Yes. I'm sure everybody thought that we're not going to make it, because they were systematically starving. People who died, children would die. I wouldn't see actually dead children, but I knew there were children were missing, and I never questioned, where did they go? Their parents are still there, where did they go? There's a child missing from this family, there's a child from that. And eventually they would replace; they would send new people for the work, for the labor, because that munitions factory was very important.

As a matter of fact, I went back to Germany last summer, and I went back to Chemnitz, and I stood where that camp was, and I recognized the railroad tracks. And I said to my husband as I looked, I said, "'In back of me there should be a factory.'" And he said, "'Turn around.'" When I turned around, there's the factory. It's all there. When I asked the German woman in town about the camp, did she see it? She says "'Yeah.'" I said, "'Well, I was there.'" And she says, "'That's impossible, there were no children in there.'" And I said, "'Madam, there were many children there.'" She said, "'That's impossible, we would have known.'" I said, "'When you saw people in there, behind the wire, didn't you wonder?'" "'Oh no,'" she said, "'You're not allowed to asked questions. You don't know who you are talking to. They might report you, and you'll go to a concentration camp, so you ask nothing.'"

You don't even take a close look.

Well, she didn't. She didn't know there where children there.

And you weren't children any more.

No, no, we looked like children, though. But she was convinced that there were no children there. So many people, and she didn't know. No one asked who were we, what were you doing there. Nobody cared.

So this was the welcome that you got. You were fleeing the Ukrainians.

Yeah, always running from somebody.

And Germany turned out to be a prison camp for you. Your crime?

Being Polish.

Being Polish, being refugees?

No, we were their labor.

Your parents had not committed any sabotage, or rose up against the German regime?

Nothing, nothing. An aunt of mine who left Poland with us at the same time, she was pregnant, and gave birth to a baby in Freiburg (Freiburg im Breisgau). They took the baby from her, and drained the blood for the German troops. And eventually, in a few weeks, the baby died. My grandmother worked for a German bower, a farm. She was fed so poorly that she just died of starvation there, they were so cruel.

So family members perished?

Yeah, yeah. It's so hard to imagine things like that if you've lived in freedom all your life, like in America. It's so hard. Sometimes children say to me, "'Why didn't you protest?'" Well, who, to whom, where? Who was going to listen to you? I think, in Poland, probably, it was a paradox. We were victims, and yet some managed to be rescuers of others. Some Poles were lucky enough to have saved some Jews. It's a paradox to me that they could have done that, and they did, they did.

Your younger brothers and sisters all survived?

Yes, my youngest sister died of cancer about five, six years ago. The rest are fine.

Do you have anything to add, additional reflections?

The older I get, the wiser I get, the less I understand. Why? Why? Why? I'm so disappointed in people, sometimes, that we do that to each other. I don't know why, what for? We all look so much alike, feel the same way, hurt. There's so much more that binds us than divides us, and yet we take sometimes pride in dividing from others as if we're different. I've seen that in Europe, now with national pride coming in, and that worries me. Human pride would have been so much better.

Will it ever end?

No more for me.

Thank you for your story.