

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**  
**RG-50.030\*0703**

## PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

## **HELENA KNAPCZYK**

### **May 10, 2013**

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mrs. **Knapczyk**, on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013, in **Trumbull, Connecticut**. And first of all, thank you very much – much, Mrs. **Knapczyk** for agreeing to speak with us today.

Answer: It's my pleasure.

Q: I'd like to start the interview with very simple, basic questions. Could you tell me your maiden name at birth?

A: **Kubowicz**.

Q: And your first name?

A: **Helena**.

Q: **Helena Kubowicz**. And when were you born? What was the date?

A: I born eight of August, 1928 in **Kolonia Niedźwiedza**, nearly the city **Mosty Wielkie, Żółkiew** and **Lwów**. It's about 30 mi – 30 kilometers(ph) from **Lwów**.

Q: And can you describe geographically where – where in **Poland** your – your birthplace is?

A: Is – is southeast.

Q: In the southeast?

A: Yes.

Q: In the southeast part of the country?

A: Yes, on the [indecipherable]

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Okay. Were you born in a village, or a town?

A: This is – was colony, they call.

Q: A colony?

A: Is like a village, but the colony, that was people coming from all over, after first war. And they call not village, only colony.

Q: So it's a newly established –

A: New **bist(ph)**, yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Was it a agricultural place? Was it a farming colony?

A: Yeah, is a farming, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Farming colony.

Q: And about how large was it?

A: We have about more than 60 numbers.

Q: Sixty people, or 60 homes?

A: No, no, numbers of houses.

Q: Okay, 60 houses.

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: Okay. And can you tell me just the name of the colony once more?

A: **Niedźwiedza**.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

**Q: Niedźwiedza.**

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And where – fr-from what part of **Poland** did your parents come to this colony?

A: They came from **Kraków**, nearly **Kraków**, **Bochnia**. My mother, they came from **Łapanów**.

**Q: Łapanów.**

A: **Łapanów**. **Łapanów** is very close to **Bochnia**, and is **Kraków**, you know, state.

Q: Okay, and were they from the same place, or did they come from different places?

A: No, they both came nearly the same place. They – they live not too far from one another, and they married, and they came from **Kempanow**(ph).

**Q: Kempanow(ph).**

A: Yeah.

Q: And what was the reason for it? Because this is something new for me, I've never heard of these colonies before.

A: Yeah, they – that was, I think, reason that they wanted to extend, you know, more farms, you know, bigger farm. And that's what I hear from them, was much cheaper and much better, you know, for farming.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: So the land was good.

A: For – for land. Is much better land than it was where they live before. And that's why they decide to move, 1920, after, you know, first war. 1920 they move from **Łapanów** to **Niedźwiedza**. And in **Niedźwiedza** the people was coming from all over the **Poland**, and even some they live in **America**, and they came after, when **Poland** was free. They wanted to live in **Poland**, and they came over the – we have at least 10 people, they came from **America**. That's why we calling colony, because they came from all over, it's not the same, you know, from –

Q: It's not like a village that is 200 years old. It's not the same thing.

A: No.

Q: Yeah.

A: Village is two – that was young.

Q: Yeah.

A: Young, yeah. After first war, that start that colony. And we always call not a village, only colony, I don't know why.

Q: Yeah.

A: When we put on the address, we put colony – **kolonia Niedźwiedza**, not –

Q: Yeah.

A: – village [**indecipherable**]

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: What was your father's name?

A: My – **Jan**.

Q: **Jan**. And your mother's?

A: **Maria**.

Q: And her maiden name?

A: **Stalmach**(ph).

Q: **Stalmach**(ph)?

A: Yes.

Q: That sounds German. Did she have German background?

A: Maybe, I don't know. I can't tell you, but **Stalmach**(ph).

Q: **Stalmach**(ph) was her maiden name.

A: Yeah.

Q: And were they – were their parents farmers?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: My mother, he was a builder.

Q: Your mother –

A: Father.

Q: Your – your grandfather on your mother's side.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Yeah, was a builder.

Q: Was a builder.

A: But my father was a farmer.

Q: Okay. And when they came, and they joined the colony, and I take it must have built themselves a house, how many children did they have?

A: They came with the three children from, you know, bogi – you know, **Łapanów**, and over here born seven more.

Q: So 10?

A: No, no, s – what I am talking? Three and six – five. Five more.

Q: Five more.

A: Five more.

Q: So, eight children in total?

A: Eight children they have, yeah.

Q: Can you tell me their names from oldest to youngest, and if you remember, when they were born?

A: Y-Yes, yes. Where they born? **Franciszek**, **Jusef**(ph) and **Anna**, they born in **Kempanow**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: Anok – you know, state of **Kraków**.



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: And **Franciszek** and **Jusef**(ph) then, are boys?

A: **Franciszek**?

Q: **Franciszek**, is that a boy's name or a girl's name?

A: Boy, boy, boy.

Q: Boy.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: That's what I thought.

A: Yeah, **Franciszek**, yeah.

Q: That's what I thought, yeah.

A: **Franciszek**, **Jusef**(ph) e **Anna**.

Q: Okay, so two boys, a girl.

A: Thr – yeah, they born in the same place.

Q: Okay.

A: And after, **Janina**, **Sofiascza**(ph) – you know, we have one more, but she die when she was two weeks more. Then **Maria**, **Helena**, **Mikhelena**(ph), and **Honorata**(ph).

Q: So you're the third youngest.

A: Youngest, yeah.

Q: So after you, there are younger, **Mikhelina**(ph) and **Honorata**(ph).

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And do you have any earliest memories?

A: Yes.

Q: What would they be?

A: You know, I remember when my youngest sister born. I remember very well that day. I remember her christening. And after I remember, you know, all kinds of – what we've been doing at school, because I was going to school. I finished four classes, and I supposed to go to fifth, but you know, the war came. And I remember all kinds of **kościelne**, you know, churches, you know, events, you know, like masses and all that. And I remember very well when the war start. I rem –

Q: We'll – we'll talk about that in a little bit

A: Yeah. But –

Q: Right – right now – I'm sorry to interrupt, but right now what I'm trying to get a sense of is what was the world you were born into? What was the life that you grew up in? What were your parents like, what was the village life like, the colony's life like, and things like that. So we'll dwell a while on this, and then we'll come to those things.

A: Yeah. If comes to that colony, that people been very friendly, they been very happy, they be so happy that **Poland** became free. I remember they – they really

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

showed that with the – like academia, you know, the – we have like patriotic, you know, things. They always went, you know, we have like **[speaks Polish]**. We have – oh, another group, oh, how they call? **Szeltza(ph)**.

Q: What are these?

A: Th-They **[Polish]**, it's – they been like a group – gymnastic group. And –

Q: I see. For children?

A: – you joi – for children, and they teach gymnastic, and you know, they raise the children for – for healthy, and very patriotic people, and the **szeltza(ph)** was like a – the – for the older – like, I think from 18, they – you can sign, be member. And they been like a – half of the soldiers. They make all kinds of, you know, practice with the – even arm – they have, you know –

Q: So this would be for young men? Yeah.

A: For young men, prepare them before that – to the army.

Q: Army.

A: Something like that. They have organization like that, and my – my both brothers, they belongs to that organization when they been younger, and the same to the **sokol(ph)**, where – where belongs, I think my sister – two my sister and two my brothers, and my father and mother, they belongs to that **sokol(ph)** organization.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: And was – was there a church in the –

A: We have church, we have beautiful church, not very big, but we have beautiful church. They built, you know, that colonies when they came, they built beautiful school, we have – we have, and we live not too far of the wood – you know, forest.

Q: Oh, forest, mm-hm.

A: And we have like a picnic ground, big picnic ground, they make special like you know, and – and then get all together like a picnic. They, you know, make a – you know, all kinds of food and music. My father play vi-vi –

Q: Violin.

A: – violin. And another play accordion and another, what he play? I think drums. I don't remem – and three or four of them came, and they play and they dance, and you know, I remember that so good, it was really beautiful. I remember all the, you know, places. I went to **Żółkiew** –

Q: What's that?

A: – and in **Żółkiew** in, there was beautiful cathedral church. And over there is buried **Żółkiewski**, **Hetman Żółkiewski**, you know that he –

Q: And who was he?

A: He was a – **Hetman**, he was fighting with the – with the Muslims? Yeah.

**Vinnek**(ph), please help.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

**Q: Hetman** –

**A: Hetman Żółkiewski.**

**Q:** Was he a oh – was he – this would have been what century?

**A:** That was in eight – seven – no, 19. **Vinne**(ph), help me. Eighteen – 18 century where is the **[speaks Polish]** Yeah.

**Q:** Okay, but he was – he was somebody –

**A:** You know, but h-he was – he was like a general, he was like a – a chief of that army, and he – they win, but you know, I –

**Q:** Okay, would have this been before the partition of **Poland** in 1795?

**A:** Yeah. Yeah, maybe, yeah, yeah, maybe that time was in history. And I saw his – his laying over there, in the –

**Q:** His what?

**A:** His, you know, was, you know, his ha – casket, or what, is over there.

**Q:** Oh, you mean his gr – his grave?

**A:** Grave, yeah.

**Q:** Grave.

**A:** Was under the – that church in – you know, and I saw him, he was laying in – he got casket like a glass, and he's **balsam**(ph), yeah.

**Q:** He was – he was embalmed?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: **Balsama**(ph), you know –

Q: You mean, he –

A: – when you put people the –

Q: So –

A: – that they stay for long.

Q: So he was embalmed.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you could see actual – the actual person.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Wow. Wow.

A: Embalm, yeah, yeah. And I saw him, and so many **skelets**(ph) I saw, and – in **Żółkiew**, and in **Mosty Wielkie**, we have a big church over there, and we been, you know, confir – confirm over there. And I – you know, and we have really happy life. Wasn't so great, because you know, maybe on beginning, because everybody was struggle to build the house. Like my parents one day came, they built only small house, you know, not – not big, like my mother, she explained to us. But after two years they start building bigger house, and we have really nice, how to say, you know, good life. We didn't have, you know, where ve – you know, that luxury what you have now, you have to understand that. We didn't have, you

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

know, television, we didn't have no car, no – no all these things, you know, machines, all of that. But we manage. I don't know how people manage, but sometimes when I hear over – see over there, the food what we ate, and all this, we been thinking in **Poland**, oh, was like nothing. And over here I see that was really delicious, all this stuff. Everything from the garden, we have beautiful fruit, you know, trees. And we have all kinds – what you only think we have in the garden, and you know, all fresh. And you know, we been doing – we have little store, like for every day, like, you know –

Q: Sure.

A: – somebody wanted to buy like –

Q: Were the roads – tell me – I want to get a sense of the layout and the geography of the village. Were the roads dirt roads, or were they paved? The roads, in – in – in the colony.

A: Oh, roads. Roads, no, they been like – like, you know, h-how to say, normal like in – in the farms.

Q: So it's not paved. No asphalt.

A: Not – no, no, no, not asphalt, no.

Q: No asphalt.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: No, we didn't have. Asphalt we have when we go – went from the colony, there was asphalt very close to us, when you been going to – to **Mosty Wielkie** or **Żółkiew**. That was like a mile, two miles. Then we have asphalt roads, and we been going to **Lwów**, and all the – that was asphalt. But on the inside of that colony, we have like normal roads.

Q: Normal means dirt roads?

A: Yeah.

Q: Dirt or paved road with stones?

A: No, no, like a dirt roads.

Q: Dirt roads.

A: Yeah, like a – it was maybe better than dirt roads, but was roads, not asphalt, no.

Q: Not asphalt.

A: We didn't have that.

Q: And then, did anybody in the colony have a car?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: No.

Q: Did your family have a radio?

A: Yes, we have a radio. We have motorcycle.



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Okay.

A: You know [**indecipherable**] to the machines, and I think that's all.

Q: Did you –

A: And a – all that was horse –

Q: Okay, I'm going to ask a lot of questions here now. How large was the farm that your family had?

A: We have 20 **morga**. That's how many acs – a **morga** is bigger than a acks – it's about 25 eggs.

Q: Acres?

A: Yeah, and we have –

Q: Hectares, would you know how many hectares that would be?

A: Hectares? It's about 25.

Q: Twenty-five hectares?

A: Yeah. And four ec – hectares of forest.

Q: Okay.

A: And we have, you know, and – and you know, my father, he was have a, like a special house, you know, the bulls? And was very – was like so many people was coming, you know, and he make business with that, you know, with esp – you know, special –

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Well, what he do – what did he do with those – with the –

A: You know the bull?

Q: Yeah, the bull.

A: You know they make –

Q: Got it. So he paired them with the – with a –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay, so this was –

A: Yeah.

Q: – it wasn't that he was dairy production, as much as –

A: No, no, he – he has few of them, and as – you know, special, he was bringing like from **Belgium**, from den – yeah, from **Denmark**, something special kinds of cows that they give you a good milk, and a lot.

Q: And did he sell –

A: And he – he got – yeah.

Q: He would sell the animals?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And he producted that – that he – that was his pretty big business with this, you know, with that kind.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: So how many did you have at any one time?

A: Oh, we have about 40.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah, and he got that bulls, about three.

Q: Okay.

A: And like I know he charge, I don't know, I think 25 **zloty** for one. And they been – people coming from all over the villages, and all this, and that's what happen. You know what I mean.

Q: You mean the – in order for their cows to get bulls like this –

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: A stud bull, maybe.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: I don't know what it's called.

A: Something like that, I don't know, but he was doing the, you know, all this, you know, like that.

Q: So did – did he farm the land as well?

A: Well, yeah, he did, yeah, and –

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: What did he produce?

A: – but sometimes he ask for help when we have more work.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, they came like for two days or three days, and where he needed, and for – we have that fruit tree, you know, about four eggs. Then he always ask –

Q: Four acres of fruit trees?

A: Yes, oh beautiful –

Q: That's a lot.

A: – beautiful, you – I – I – I – I travel so much on – in the world, I never saw something like. And he ask some people **specialies**(ph), they been coming, they know how to cut, how to plant it again, how to – they – they make it white with the –

Q: Was it gray – what – what kind of fruit was it?

A: All kinds we have, you couldn't believe it. We have from small apples to big apples, what do you want it peaches, what do you want it only, you know, cherries. Oh, so many. And the – the **porzeczki**, and I don't know is in English.

Q: Just say in Polish then.

A: **Porzeczki**, grapefruit, **agrest** – **agrest** we have in, you know. And besides that, the **czeresni**(ph) cherry, all kinds of **śliwki**.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Plums.

A: Plums, yeah, yeah, **śliwki**. All kinds, you know, of this, we have so much of that, all kinds of things.

Q: It sounds – it sound delicious.

A: Yeah, I know. We have so many. That's what I – I am thinking that we grew up, you know, sometimes I'm thinking, oh, in **Poland** was no, we didn't have this, we didn't have that. But if we – I have that, all of what I had before war in **Poland**, you know, around my house. Everything was fresh, everything so delicious, fruits and vegetable, and – and f – you know, milk and cheeses, where you know, my mother making butter, and all this was all fresh.

Q: And did he sell these products, or did – was this to sustain the family, mostly?

A: No, we didn't sell any milk product, we only use to ourselves, you know, and he only asks sometimes people, they been coming pick up some cherries, and all this, and they took it to sell. And if they have profit, I don't know. He said, I think 20 percent, or something, they been bringing to him, but he didn't do that.

Q: I see.

A: We didn't do that, no.

Q: Okay.

A: Only he asks people, that people was like that, they come.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Did he sa – what else did he grow? Did he have – did he grow wheat, did he grow rye, did he grow –

A: Well, yes, yes.

Q: Okay, so what of these grains did he grow? Which wa – which one?

A: **Przytop**(ph) **pszenica**, you know, wheat.

Q: I don't – is that wheat?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Wheat. Yeah, and **owies**, that's –

Q: And what's that?

A: **Owies**, that's for feed the – you know, animals, and horses, special horses, **owies**. I don't know how in English that.

Q: It's okay.

A: I don't know.

Q: And did he sell this, or was this also for the family?

A: No, this was the time where use – I – I think he sell some, yeah, he sell. But some, you know, was for us, but his – used to sell with the, you know –

Q: Okay.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: – how many kilos or something like that. Sacks, you know, sacks like this, and yeah, he sell to the –

Q: And i – would it be accurate to say that most of the business from the family came from the cows, and –

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And from the farm.

Q: Okay.

A: And from the fruits, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. And we have a little store, that helped, too.

Q: Okay. Oh, you owned the store.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: We ow – you owned the store.

A: Oh yeah, we have all kinds of things for – what people needed in colony, you know, like, you know, cleaning shoes, and sugar, and – and were cigarettes and all kinds of these things we have. We have pretty, you know, big store, and – and you know, all kinds of things, like for everyday use. You know, soap –

Q: Yeah.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: – and you know, something like that.

Q: The sorts of things that you can't make yourself, or create yourself, that –

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. And would you have considered your – your family, you know, on those circumstances, in those times, well-to-do? In other words, one of the better off farmers, not a poor farmer?

A: I think we been like middle class.

Q: Middle class.

A: Because maybe some people they have, you know, bigger places, or I don't know, in the c – on that colony, we been like in good shape. Yeah, I think that better farmers. But maybe, you know, some was the Germans' villages, some, you know, maybe they been re – I don't know right now, but in colony we been doing –

Q: When you said German villages, were German villages generally mo – richer?

A: I think they been doing good. I – I never been on German, but my brother, they used to go, and they says that they been doing good.

Q: I see. I see.

A: Yeah, but I don't know, you know, I was too young –

Q: Yeah, of course, of course.



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: – I can't tell you. You know, and this, but I only hear from my oldest brother, they been – come and they s – they sometimes the – how they doing, that they have this, they have that, and you know, looks right.

Q: Did your fa – did your father when he was – when he was farming, did he have any equipment, or did he, for example, how did he harvest the wheat?

A: Yeah, he – no, this one, he got the – he has the ho – the horse, you know, pull?

Q: Okay.

A: You know how that? And in the – after, when they was – you know, wood – wood – wood – not wood only, wheats.

Q: With scythes? That – that is with those curved blades, yeah. The scythes.

A: When he cut. Yeah, he cut with this, yeah. But after, he got machine that was –

Q: Threshing?

A: Threshing, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: He had machine put up. And that's – that's it, what he has, you know, that time.

Q: Okay. And were most of the people in the colony, you know, well-off enough that they weren't hungry? Were there any poor people in there?

A: No. Maybe we have one family that his wife die, and he got seven children. And this man, he – he was poor. He was really – he got hard time, and but some people

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

was helping him. But the rest, they have – everybody has okay. Nobody was hungry, they been dressed up nice, and you know, the children, you know, they did, okay. I didn't see, you know, really poor, poor person. And around the houses, they have nice. I used to go, you know, to this house and that house. They have clean, nice houses. I did see on the colony, but the rest, some that villages, what I hear, and others, they been poor.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah. But, you know where – I didn't see myself.

Q: Okay. Let me gather my thoughts for a minute. **[break]** So – so in the **kolonia**, it was, you know, people had enough to eat, they weren't poor, aside from that one family that you – that you mentioned. And there was wonderful food, that was fresh. And there was a way of making one a living, you know, you – for you – for example, for your father through the – the beef, the cows, the bulls, and so on. I want to turn now a little bit to your family itself. Tell me a little bit about your father and your mother as people. What do you remember about them as personalities? What kind of manner and nature did they have? Just let's start with your mother.

A: My mother, she was, you know, not very big woman. She was a small woman, and very hard working, that's what I can say. And she was very religion,

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

very patriotic. She has beautiful voice, she always in the church, or somewhere when we been, she start to singing, and everybody, you know, like she was a – a [indecipherable] –

Q: Yeah.

A: – you know, something like that. She was very good cooker – cook, and baking. She sewing for us, and she always wanted us that we have much better than she has, because she has very hard time during the first war. She was under the Australian oc-occupation.

Q: The Austrian.

A: **Austria** – **Austria** occupation. And you know, the father, he was in the army, and she was with the first two children, and she was pregnant with my sister. She has very hard time, she was hungry. The Russian beat her and all this. She went all through very ba – hard time. And she always wanted for us that we never wanted go through that. She has says – she says her children play – pray every day that you don – you not going go through what I went. And she wanted make us very happy, she like dressed up so nice, and she always, you know, went to the, you know, city. She bought for us this and that. She was very, very good mother. But if comes to the father, he was very tough, very more himself. He liked to go, you know, to the

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

city. She liked to dressed up very nice, he wants to show that he is, you know, I am the man, I am the, you know –

Q: The head of the house.

A: – fa – yeah, head of the home. And we been afraid of him. Like Mother with, we never been afraid, we always, you know, stick to the mother. If somebody hurt, or something, then we always run to the mother. And – but he was mostly – but if comes to the – the – they live – you know, they been happy. They – he was helping her with food. He was responsible to – to bring there food, you know, the money. You know he was thinking. But you couldn't, like, really love him. He – he loves us, but we couldn't, you know, I don't know why, but when he walk in the – you know, room, we been always, what is going you – who is going to say to her, or to her, or – or to him. And he wasn't very friendly with the sons, I don't know why. And – but my mother, sh – they – they love her, and they al-always take to her, but the daughters, they would been more like the father, you know. More, you know, talk to him and all this. But I don't know what happen in ours house, that the sons, they didn't go along with the father. I think he ec – expecting from them so much, I don't know. They have to study, they have to help, you know, in the field, and they shouldn't go over here, over there. But they been, you know, like, very handsome boys, and they like a life, and you know, they wanted to go with the girls, and he

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

was so upset. You have to stay home, and you know. But you know, like 18 - 20, how he can stay home? Normal.

Q: It's normal. Of course not.

A: And they have fight with the – all this. But like a family, I think we been good family, you know, we been always go together to church. We always go to the – you know, Polish, you know, like we have a **[indecipherable]** so that, what I told you, that my, you know, picnic, and all this. Then we been close, and I think we been – always, in every family, you have something.

Q: Yeah.

A: But we didn't have so bad like really in some families. We have, you know, fight between parents, and sometimes the sister was fighting, and you know, but no –

Q: Well, you had a lot of people.

A: – not – yeah, but not – I think I can tell that we like one another, because we stick to the end, you know. All ours life, how we live, we been okay. But really, we have so nice mother. We have – that mother, she – she keeps us, you know, she was really mother, yeah, and we love her so much, you know, she was ver –

Q: And her name again, was **Maria**?

A: **Maria**, yeah.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

**Q: Maria.**

**A: Maria.** She was very friendly, she – she never – what somebody ask her for help, she never say no. She has time for everybody, over here, over there, I don't know. She was very, very hardworking woman.

**Q:** Were there – were you closer to some of your sisters and brothers than to others?

**A:** I – I – I love my brothers. I love special the oldest. I don't know why, I think he wa – he feel like he's responsible to help us, the younger, you know, children. And him, I remember he used to take me so – so many times on his laps. And he liked to teach, you know, us, you know, he – he – he always, you know, oh, say which letter is that, and – and how much is two and two, and this and that. And you can't believe it that he teach me multiply table – dub – multiply –

**Q:** Your multiplication tables.

**A:** When I went to school, I knew already. He – you know, every few days, **Helen**, how much is this and this? **Helen**, how much – and, you know, I – I really love him, you know, and he was – I think he feel like he's a – you know, like a father for us, you know, he – he tried to do, he was very nice. And you know, like Father, he was more busy with everything. He was always make business, he – with one city and another city, and you know, and this and that. He was – you know, but

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

them, you know, they been very nice to us. He used to take us on the horse, you know, ride on the horse, and on motorcycle, and – and bicycle, and they been very good. And the sisters, I – I tell you the truth, that I love of them all. They been really nice sister. Specially, you know, the oldest, she was so good to her mother. Oh my goodness, she was helping her everywhere, and you know, all this. But we been really like one another. I can't – I cannot really tell you which one I don't like.

Q: Okay, yeah.

A: I like them all so much.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: With such a large family, did you – did you ne – have a need to have friends outside, that were your own age?

A: Not much.

Q: I see.

A: Not much. I have friends. I have, you know, a few girls friends. And we have cousins. My – my mother brother, he came from **Kraków** too, and he was live in that colony, too. And – and that was eight children over there, too. Then we been with that cousin pretty often, because my mother, and – she has only the brother,

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

and they like one another so much, and they been always – we get all together with them, and all that. But really, from outside, we didn't need much, you know, friends, because we been all together in – specially the – all that, you know, where the sisters and brother, they took good care of us, you couldn't believe it. I never forget when, in the winter, we – we have all skis, you know, and we have, you know, snow, pretty big snow. And the field was all, you know, snow, and they always says, come on, we go on the ski. And we took it and where we used to go, you know, like on that ski, and sometimes in the evening there, moon shines so nice. And we been [indecipherable] you know, like to say, one, you know, one – one way another, and after we met on that ski, it was so beautiful, so nice. It comes to that, we been always, you know, that some –

Q: You had some – some – you played together.

A: Yeah, we play all together. Was really a in – I can't forget to today all this stuff, how the – you know, we're all, from the oldest, to the nearly youngest, even that, she was only six, I remember, seven. And she has a little – you know, we all have skis. Everybody has a ski. And we used to go on that skis, and – and you know, and then in summertime we have river, we used to go that they take care of – of us, and we – we play in the water, and we have very nice, you know, specially the oldest,



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

they took care of the youngest and we been the youngest, and they been so nice to us.

Q: Did everybody help at home as well?

A: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, they help a lot.

Q: Okay.

A: The brothers, that my s – oldest sister, she was – she was like a mother, she – she used to be very clean, oh my goodness, that's what my mother has a problem with her little bit, because she didn't let us touch this, not that, she wanted everything be so on the place, and that and this. And when my mother, she went to the city, and she babysit us, then she keep us outside, and she says because, you know, when Mommy comes, she has to be everything so sparkle. And my mother, I remember one time she says, **Hanya**(ph), don't do that any more for them. Don't keep them outside, you know, let them, you know, and all this. But she was so **[indecipherable]** all her life, she was so –

Q: She was orderly.

A: – order, oh my – and she was oldest, she help a lot. And you know, another one – I – I didn't help much, you know, what I could do?

Q: You were a child.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Yeah, I bul – I was young. And, you know, they help and they were really need help, you know, then my father hire somebody, for two days, for three days, or for one day, it's all depends. And this way, they – you know. Because my brother, he went up there to the army, you know, he wasn't home, and another wasn't home either. Then, you know, he has to ask somebody, but he was doing good.

Q: In the colony – in the colony, were they – were – was everybody who lived there, of the 60 houses you mentioned, was everybody Roman Catholic?

A: Oh yeah, we're in – all.

Q: All.

A: All.

Q: So there weren't any other –

A: No, no another religion. We been all Roman Catholic.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: You know, in that village. All Polish people, not mixed people.

Q: Okay.

A: We been all Polish people, and all Catholics, I – I didn't even one person was another religion. We were all Catholics.

Q: So did you ever – did you – did you know that there were – that there were a lot of Jews who lived in **Poland**? Had you –

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: We knew, oh yeah. The Jews, they live in the city, in **Mosty Wielkie**. Oh yeah, we – we always – we had been buying the stuff from them. And in **Żółkiew** and – and **Lwów**, but on ours colony, nobody was, only Polish people, and the Catholics. Every house, every – you know, we been all Catholics, no prote – we had villages that they been **Greco(ph)** Catholics, and – but

Q: Greek Catholics, yeah.

A: – you know, it comes to my place, we have closer, we met Jewish people in **Mosty Wielkie**, and that was like two kilometer from us –

Q: Okay.

A: – very close. To **Mosty Wielkie** we been coming like, you know, two kilo – kilometers in **Poland** –

Q: It's not much.

A: – not – not much. And we been in that city very often, and –

Q: Was it a city, or was it a town?

A: It's a town.

Q: It's a town.

A: Small town.

Q: Small town.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: **Mosty Wielkie**, they have a biggest school for police school, in **Poland**. That they have in **Mosty Wielkie**, maybe you know or no, I don't know. But it was a biggest school, police school in **Mosty Wielkie**, they have huge buildings for this – that school, and that's what the **Mosty Wielkie**, if you say that – if you been policeman, then you knew where is the **Mosty Wielkie**. And that's what you know. And over there the Jews was, and in **Żółkiew** [indecipherable] were Jewish, and in **Lwów**, too, there was so many. But not in the – ours village, no.

Q: Okay. And did your father have any – or through the store, did you have like regular business contacts?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: My – my father, he has with the Jewish people, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: He order at – you know, some – I know, that he used to go always to **Mosty Wielkie**, because **Żółkiew** – I mean, **Żółkiew**, because **Mosty Wielkie** was a small city, but **Żółkiew** was a bigger –

Q: Okay.

A: – you know, town, yeah. And –

Q: And did you ever meet any of these – of his business contacts?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: You know, they been coming sometimes, to ours house, and you know, the – you know, but I – I can't tell you that I – you know, like my father, he was very – if he make business, he didn't want to have a children –

Q: Around.

A: – close to him, you know how is in **Poland**.

Q: Of course.

A: They always keep children on the side, you – you couldn't know this or that, because you know, not like today the children, the parents talking and they come, and – and they have more to say. Not he – before in **Poland**, before war. We – we been always, no, you can't be over here, you have to leave and you know, that's why I – I don't know too much about. But I know he has business, I know that.

Q: And were there – excuse me **[break]** What were the views in the village about Jewish people, and people who weren't Polish, in general.

A: You know, was some different, you know. Some, they been very friendly, you know, they never say nothing about. And some are not too much. They been saying that they cheat, you know, that they – you know, charge too much for this or for that, they shouldn't charge. Something like that, but never been, you know, something – they didn't talk too much about – you know. We talk – I hear more the

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

older people talk more about Ukrainian people, because we have round the Ukrainian people, that they talk maybe more about that than Jewish.

Q: I see. And tell me, what was it that they were – was this area also populated with Ukrainians? Were there many Ukraine –

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Was so mu – here we have some villages Ukrainian, we – after. We have that German, and we have Polish village that was last years, years, you know, how long **Poland** maybe exist. And that's what they call village, you know –

Q: Okay.

A: – cause Polish people been over there. But I explained to you that colony, that people came after the first

Q: Yes, what I mean is, in the general region. In the general region, were there a lot of Ukrainian people? Was this a mixed region?

A: You know, I mean, round the – that colony.

Q: Not the colony, because we know that the colonies –

A: Yeah. Then the **Mosty Wielkie**, **Żółkiew**, all that villages around the – the cities, was Ukrainian. Was more Ukrainian under Polish people.

Q: I see.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Yeah, most – mus – much more.

Q: Much more.

A: Yeah, that – you can tell that there was region – Ukrainian region.

Q: I see.

A: Not the Polish.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: And were there any relations with the Ukrainians at all?

A: Yeah, we have a relationship with the Ukrainian, we been going to school all together. We play with them all together, and we visit sometimes.

Q: But not in the colony, because they – there weren't any living in the colony.

A: No, in colony we didn't have any Ukrainian, no. All Polish people.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, but they were –

Q: Was that something – was that something done on purpose? To build that colony, that i – that it was that way, or was it – just turned out that way?

A: Oh, I think it's turned out this way, that that space over there, somebody – that **rabini**(ph), you know, the rich woman was over there. We been friendly, you know, to the end, to the last minute, with death of my father. And she has so much

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

field, and she wanted, you know, s-sell some. And that's what we – we did, and I don't know how this colony is new, how is my father find out that, you know? I –

Q: That there's a person who owns all this land and is selling them?

A: Yeah, and she wanted so – yeah.

Q: Was she an aristocratic lady, **Rabin**(ph)?

A: **Rabin**(ph)? Yeah, she was a **rabini**(ph) wi – I think she must be aristocratic, but see, I was thinking and thinking. I knew and – remember, and I am not long time ago, and if my sister alive, that I would ask them, and now I forget her name. She was very nice to us, very nice to that colony's people. And – and that's what we both learn from her.

Q: I see.

A: She was with two daughters. And she has her church, she has beautiful house. She was always – you know, she has like castle, not a house, like a palace – palace, yeah. And – and she was very helpful for us. I don't know why for that colony's, because we both from **[indecipherable]** land.

Q: Okay. And when people in the village were talking about Ukrainians, in what way? What were the types of conversation?

A: Sometimes, you know, they talk bad and good. You know, like all the – because sometimes they have fight, you know, the Polish people with them, they – they



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

have dances, you know, and the – went to that dance, the Polish people went and German people, and you know, they have si – you know, places, and Ukrainian, and sometimes the Ukrainians start to fighting, and sometimes, you know, they hurt some people. And they says, oh, you should be afraid of Ukrainian, because they can kill you. But we hear only how they –

Q: Rumors.

A: – talking rumors, yeah.

Q: Yeah, rumors.

A: But some day, we been friendly with some. I can't say, you know, that – like normal, like, you know, something happen. But I only know that they talk more about Ukrainian, because we have more to do with the Ukrainian, because they been closer to us, and all this, than about Jewish. About Jewish I hear, you know, sometimes, but really never bad that they – you know, they go and kill you, or this or that, they talk more about Ukrainian like that – this way. But about Jewish they – I remember only they complain about price, that you know, this, or you know, but wasn't bad. About Ukrainian they been more like, oh, he going hurt you, you be careful, don't, you know, go, or something like that.

Q: I see.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: But not much, you know, but they been – went to the school with us, we – we been learning Ukrainian.

Q: Uh-huh?

A: Yeah, we have to learn **Ukrainia**.

Q: So – so you spoke both Ukrainian and Polish at home?

A: Yeah. No. No, no, no.

Q: Oh no, I mean, you spoke both languages.

A: At home we always –

Q: Polish.

A: – only Polish.

Q: Okay.

A: But we have to learn Ukrainian, yeah.

Q: Uh-huh. I see.

A: And – and they been learning like we, all the subjects, and we go this – this way.

Q: Okay. Is there anything about your school life that you remember, that you know, was particularly important to you? Were there subjects that you liked, or teachers that you liked?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Yeah. Oh, I liked my teachers so – so much. And I don't want to say nothing, but I – the – I told you that my brother, he prepare me so good, that the – that teacher, one time I was second grade, and she call me to the fourth grade, because she – some – they didn't know that, you know, **tablica** –

Q: The – the tables, the mult-multiplication tables.

A: Table, yeah. They didn't know. And we been – you know, have, you know, rooms, like you know, you only – was hall and you came to the 'nother. And that teacher came, and she says, **Helenka**(ph), **Helenka**(ph), come on over here, come on over here. And I thought, what she wants from me, you know, to go to the fourth grade? And – and – but I went. And sh – and she start asking me that table, and I knew. And she says, look, she's in second grade, and you are in fourth, and she knows more than you. And I was – and in that fourth grade my sister was, you know, my – and it was so funny. That – I never forget that. And I was – I was liked by that teacher, she likes me, and we have very nice, you know, they did – you know, like I told you, the trips and they teach us very nice, you know, if comes – I don't know. I have very good memories from my school, and I have good math. My father – oh, that's what Father was good about, the – we like him. He always, when somebody bring a good mark, he s – he always hug, and he give sometimes, you know, one **zloty** or something, buy something. And he said, keep going, you

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

know, girl, keep going. You know, like that. And – and you know, and that's what I have, you know, from my father. He – he wanted us so much to – you will be good at school. He was –

Q: So you would be educated.

A: – very – yeah, educated, yeah, he was good. And my mother too, but I – I only have more feeling from him when we bring a good marks. But I – I love my school, we been very happy. Was a good teacher and I was in that school, you know, to – to the war.

Q: So tell me – now let's turn a little bit, towards the wider world. In the 1930s, the – you know, when you're in a small place like the colony you're talking about.

A: Yeah.

Q: How much did the events that were going on in **Germany**, or in **Russia**, or in – or even in **Warsaw**, how much did that matter? How much did people talk about such things?

A: You know, we have radio, and they been coming to ours house, and they listen. We have always company, they – they been coming. What I cou – could say – and some they been visit us like from **Kraków**, from I think one time one lady came from **Warsaw** to visit somebody in the – at that colony. But I can't tell you if – they talk about polit – I know they like to talk about politics and all this, but I got to

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

remember to tell you now what they been saying, you know. I hear about **Germany**, and about **France** and about **[indecipherable]** politics, you know, all the time. I think my father, he like to be – you know, talking. But special, I can't tell you something like that. Even about that, war came, we didn't hear nothing that something's going happen. I – I can't remember nothing.

Q: Well now, that's my next question, it was going to be my next question, is do you remember where you were when you learned that **Poland** was invaded?

A: Yeah, I – that I remember very well.

Q: Tell me.

A: We been in the morning, we been getting to school. And my father, he always, when only he get up, you know, he always early than – than us, he put the radio. And that was about seven o'clock, and he said to my mother, **Marisz**(ph), you know, the Germans invited the Pole – **Poland** he said, two people crossed the –

Q: Border.

A: – border. And that time I hear that, and – and after we hear, you know, how **[indecipherable]** he was talking to the radio, and how he was saying, you know, this – this day, and after we been, you know, listen all day, you know? But that I remember so good, and after, you know, I went to school, and we came back and my father, he said, and my mother is not doing good at the – it's – we are in the

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

war. And I remember so good that morning how my father, he said in the radio, that it's war start, you know, wi – that **Germany** crossed the **bort**(ph), and it's going start the war. And then, you know, we listen all the time, you know, what happen, and – and you know, and a – then we have so many people it was coming from, you know, running.

Q: From where?

A: From Germans, you know.

Q: From the – from the west?

A: West, yeah –

Q: [**indecipherable**] east.

A: – from the west, oh, we have so many. They slept everywhere, in house, house. And my mother, she – she baked the bread, you know, nearly every day. And she says, oh, they may be going – they been run to the – to go, you know, to east, and go to the **Rumunia** and the – you know, **Hungary**, and all this. We have so many people started running. But it didn't last long, because only after two weeks, Russian came. And – and you know, when that war started, I remember, God help the –

Q: Hang on a second. So you never saw any Germans, at all?

A: I saw.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: You saw?

A: Yeah, they been –

Q: So first – so tell me, did they come before the Russians?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Okay, so let's talk about that first. Tell me first about, the war starts, you have refugees. When's the first time you saw – when's the first time the war really came to your colony?

A: War, I think maybe after two weeks. The ge – you know, to us, colony, came – I saw planes, you know, on the sky, bomber, oh, you know –

Q: Bomber.

A: – heavy bomber. Oh my goodness, how many was? Sometimes you couldn't see sun, they running like crazy, was – everything was shaking, and the bombs was, you know, coming. But it didn't hit, you know, ours place, or something like that. But after that, two Germans came to ours house.

Q: Soldiers?

A: Soldiers, yeah. That's what I only see the Germans, you know, the soldiers in ours house. They came on the – and they went on that field, they been working, looking round, but they didn't hurt us, they didn't say nothing. They talk only to

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

my mother, but what they been saying, I can't remember. And I think Mother, she feed them, you know.

Q: Was it that they s – did your mother speak German?

A: No.

Q: Did your father speak –

A: I-I think – I think she unders – yeah, I think she speak, you know, not maybe so much, and Father, because they grow up in –

Q: Right.

A: – you know, but after – but they both speak very good Polish, you know, fluent, you know, like normal Polish. Then, I know that they know German, a little bit.

Not mu – I don't know, not – maybe fluent. I don't know, even, but I know that – no, because they grow up.

Q: Okay.

A: They born, you know –

Q: Okay.

A: – under the Australian occupation.

Q: Not Australian, Austrian.

A: Austrian, yeah, Austrian.



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Yeah. The soldiers were – did – were – were they – they must have been part of a military unit.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you see any more, or was this it?

A: No, only two of them, I saw.

Q: Only two of them.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And then what happened?

A: And then, you know, after **Russia** came. You know, the –

Q: Well what ha – how did that – wa – how did that happen? What was – how did that develop?

A: How is that, that we start here that **czolgis**.

Q: What's that?

A: **Czolgi**? Trunks? How you call that **czolgi**, they run, and they shoot? **Czo-Czolgi**. How is in English?

Q: Is it a gun, is it a tank?

A: No, no, **czolgi**. You don't know?

A2: Tank? Yeah.

A: Tanks, yeah, oh yeah.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Oh you – okay.

A: Oh yeah, oh my goodne – I couldn't, you know, tanks. First, that we starts hear the tanks coming, because we have a main road two miles from us, even not that.

Went from the **Mosty Wielkie** [indecipherable] came into the **Lwów**. And they start coming, you know, from – to the **Lwów**, you know, and from east. When they came, they went on the road, that was main road, wa – was a big – big, you know, ya – road. And they be coming, and that's what we hear, you know, they been coming night and day. Oh, you should see, it was shaking from that – tanks, it was going and going and going. And after stop, then the –

Q: Well, did you ex – were you surprised to see Russians?

A: We couldn't believe it, that it's going – that's what's happen. Yeah, I remember how they been talking all the – you know, my parents and some they friends and all this. And you know, all is **Russia** came, you know, Russians came. What happen, and all this. But that was like, I don't know, very disappointing, very – you know, we been all disappointed with that war. Because look, it's only 19 years when we came from that long time occupation of that three countries. And after 19 years it's again – was for us, all was shock, in German in, and – and Russians. Was – we couldn't accepted that. We been so – oh, you – you couldn't believe it, you – how you feel, you know, how we been feel, you know, that time, and you know

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

especially parents, like my mother, she says, I wish you never see that. And look, and she – the children only started growing and we pa – have it better. Because every year we have better and better. And you know, and look what happened, you know, and they again took everything from us.

Q: Well tell – well, let's get to that point. You say the Russians were going by tanks towards **Lwów**. How – what things happened after that? What happened as time went on?

A: After that start so much, you know, oh yeah, so much – they took it people, you know, arrested. So many people arrested; preach – my teach – you know, teachers, policemen, everywhere. We been like – like empty, you know, we didn't see anybody who was in the office –

Q: Who arrested them? Who wa –

A: The Russian.

Q: Okay.

A: Russian.

Q: So – but if the whole village was just Polish, how did they know who to arrest?

A: Who – how we know?

Q: No, how did they know? The Russians are coming in –

A: Oh, whom to arrested?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: No, no, no – yeah, who told them, arrest this one, arrest that one? How –

A: Russian. I don't know.

Q: No. No. Russians are foreign troops.

A: Yeah.

Q: And they're coming into your colony, and you're saying that the soldiers arrested the teacher, the priest and so on? How did they know that this was a teacher, and this was a priest and this was somebody else?

A: Somebody must said – tell to them.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know.

Q: So it wasn't anybody local who helped them at all?

A: I don't know. Maybe. I don't know. But I know only that they been arrested.

The – we didn't see th –

Q: And you heard about these things? Or did you see them?

A: How they arrested?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: No. I didn't see th – how they arrested, only it's no more, we didn't see them.

Q: They disappeared.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Disappear, and – and only we been si – talking the family was saying, oh my father was arrested, because it was – we have policeman, I was very friendly with that, and that girl, she told me, my father, they came, you know, in the night, and they arrest him. And the teacher, you know, we hear only, you know, how they been saying. But I didn't see exactly how somebody arrest – was arrested.

Q: And was this – how soon after the war started, did these things start happening?

A: When, war with Germans?

Q: Yeah, well, the war started September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939.

A: Yeah.

Q: Then it took a while for the Russians to come in.

A: Yeah, that o – an early start, I tell you right away, you know, after Russians came. I think in – in September, all September, and on beginning of October, I – I went back to school because it wasn't school.

Q: Right.

A: Was like, you know, nobody, you know, they arrested teachers –

Q: Right.

A: – and policemen and priest, and all this, and some, you know, farmers, the colonies, some they arrested. And I know the school start on beginning of October. And I went to that school, you couldn't believe it. I – I couldn't recognize nothing.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Like before war, we have, you know, like flag, we have cross on the wall. We have, you know, white, you know, eagle on there, you know. And you know, we pray before we – when we start the lessons, and – and – and lesson was like normal, and all this. And after, when I went, wa – you didn't see nothing on the wall, everything was taken. Like we have president always in every class, you know, portrait of president, you know, like – like over here, they have. And everything was taken. And the teacher was a man, and they told us that he was in the jail because he was a communist. He – the **Poland** was – he was in **Poland** in jail, because he was a communist, and now he's free, and he going to teach us. And when he came and start the lesson, you – you couldn't believe this. Nothing – only he walk in, and oh, we're going start talking about **Sowiecki sojusz**. And all the time, round and around, he was talking to us, how s – so – **Sowiecki sojusz**, how is good, how have everything, how he can ge – you know, give – give us so much. How we should, you know, stick only to the **Sowiecki sojusz**. The old countries is no good, that all this – because I was in fourth – I went to fifth on beginning, and that was history anyway [**indecipherable**] already about –

Q: What is **Sowiecki sojusz** in English? Yeah, we – how do you say it in English?

A: **Sowiecki**?

Q: **Sowiecki sojusz** in English?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: **Sojusz? Ru-Russia?** No?

Q: Well, well, the **Soviet Union**, you mean?

A: **Soviet Union**.

Q: **Soviet Union**.

A: Oh yes, **Soviet Union**.

Q: So he was talking about that, okay.

A: Yes, Soviet – **Radziecki sojusz**. They been saying so – yeah, English, yeah.

And – and – and you know, that days was only spent on that, you know, all the time like who is **Stalin**, who is – was **Lenin**, who is o – and we didn't have no map, no nothing. Only he was, you know, wanted to tell us all about Russian union.

Q: Soviet – **Soviet Union**.

A: **Soviet Union, Soviet Union**, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And then, you know, came that 10 of February, and that's it with my school.

Q: What happened in the 10<sup>th</sup> of February?

A: They took us to **Siberia**.

Q: Well tell me, what happened? How did it happen?

A: They – 10 of February, four o'clock in the morning, they came to ours house, you know, like –

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Who? Who came?

A: Russians. Russians.

Q: Soldiers?

A: Soldiers, Russian soldiers with the rifles. But few days before, I – I saw my mother and father, they been all night didn't sleep, only working from one window to another, and this and that. And they been whispering, oh, **Janek**, **[indecipherable]** happen – something going happen to us. And my father said to my – he said, **Marisz**(ph), I think is something going happen, they going do something for us, and **tada**(ph) and **tada**(ph). And after 10 of February, four o'clock in the morning, they knocked to the doors, hard knocking. And they says **oakfaray**(ph) the doors, **oakfaray**(ph), you know, in **Russia**. And my mother first jump, and I – I don't think she even slept, because they been so worried, they been so depressed. And she jumped, she opened the doors, and – and three of them walk in, and we all – you know, get up, because was so big knocked, and you know, and we been like prepared for something like that, that something is going happen to us. And everybody was on the – you know, stand up, and the two of them came to my brother, and they says, you sit down on this chair, and don't move. And one Russian came with one rifle, he this way, and another came this way, and you can't move, and my brother, he has to sit like that, and he couldn't do nothing. And they



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

says to my father, you sit down over here. And one was standing with the rifle [indecipherable]. And they says to my mother, they says, listen, from where you came over here? And my mother, she says, from **Kraków**. And he said oh [speaks **Russian**], you know, we are so good, so nice, that we going to take you from here to **Kraków**. And he said, you will have half a hours, and packed what you can, and you have to, in half a hour, leave that place. And my mother, you know, how oh my goodness, you know, she was grabbing most of the time, food. And a good thing we have that store, she grab, you know, bag of sugar. You know, 10 kilos, you know, sugar. And what she has only from the food, you know, bread and this and that. And we just grab, you know, so quick. And – and we left the – the house, and we walked to the school, because school we didn't have far, like half a mile. Maybe more li – than half hour. I walk always, to school. And we went to the school, and you should see, when we been walking, all this houses was light in every house, you know, all that colony was light. And people was coming from all over, to that school. And in the school, it wa – we sit down on the floor, everybody was sit down on the floor, and you shou – y-you can picture that, you couldn't believe it, was – we're all crying, like you – you – you know, like the ceiling was shaking. The children was from the, you know, bed, because it was four o'clock in the morning, was very cold winter. And – and they been crying, they – you know, from

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

swi – you know, break the sleeping. The mothers was worried, crying, the fathers was crying, everybody, you know, and sitting, and – and it was like screaming. And then after, when everybody they bring to this school, they bring – they brought like a truck, like a truck. They put us on that truck, and they took us to **Lwów**.

Q: Now I want to interrupt at this point. Up until then, had anybody come before, to deport other families, earlier? No.

A: No.

Q: So at first they arrested the teacher, the priest, the policeman.

A: Everybody. Everybody.

Q: Wait a minute. N-N-N – no.

A: Not everybody, I'm sorry.

Q: No. They arrested those individuals, maybe one or two farmers, but everybody else was left alone.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And then, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, then everybody was arrested. And yet, your parents were more nervous. So the last thing you told me about is about this man who tells you in school about **Stalin** and **Lenin** and the wonderful **Soviet Union**, but what happened in those months? What happened in those weeks

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

between when you start going to school, and the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, that made your parents more nervous?

A: They –

Q: What th – how did things develop?

A: They – they been nervous, they been suspicion of something, and they always – Father – my father, he went, you know, to the **Lwów** – not to the **Lwów**, but **Żółkiew**, or this or that, and he came, and I hear how he said to – to my mother, **Marisz(ph)**, you know – you know, they – I can't have – I didn't see this, because was arrested, and this – and the – and they been so worried, so nervous. My mother, she – you can see her, every morning she was crying, her tears was coming like crazy. I was – really sometimes I thinking, oh my goodness, stop the way you have the tears, so many tears. And she didn't want to like, talk to us, because she was so upset. And they – we been like – the nights was terrible. Always, you know, we hear something wrong, something is going happen. Was very miserable, you can't imagine. We – we been like how – how to say? What is going be next? We going be, you know, here, or they going, you know, shoot us, or they going to take us, or they going, you know? And – and you couldn't sell too much, nothing, as I remember, my father, he wanted sell a few things, you know, if he can get money. And I know he sell some, because he got some money. You know, when we been –

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

you know, away. And – but was so hard to sell. Nobody wanted to buy anything, nobody – was like no – no life, you know, like – like we been – I know – I can't unders – can't explain to you. It's – it wasn't no life. No, you know, at school we been miserable, terrible miserable, because how you can listen day after day, you know, about this, then we know that – that, you know, they came, and – and occupied us, and – and we – how you jump, that I finish school in the June – jul – June. And I was – religion, was singing, was everything, you know, and after, you don't have nothing, only that man, we don't know him. You know, nothing, and – an-and only round, and around and round. And the same, you know, with the – with parents, with my oldest – the one brother we didn't know where he is, my – another brother, he only hiding. We didn't see him, nearly. And – and – and the father, he was like, you know, and the mother with this children, was like – like lost. And she was – she was – oh, my gosh, so disappointed, so crying, you know, because she knew what going happen again to us, you know, and even some women, they says to her, **Marisz**(ph), you have so nice girls, you know, they growing so nice, you going to have so good life with them. And look, afterward it's come o – she knew what – what's going happen. She knew – they knew that is nothing good going to happen to us. And that we have that what? September was

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

so-so, you know, with this. And after October, November, December, January, and February we went – we left that place, for good.

Q: Did this also affect your Christmas?

A: Of course, yeah, was very, very sad Christmas. We nearly didn't have a Christmas, you know, my – my mother, you know, but we – we have beautiful Christmas, last one, '38. But this one we – we been like lost, because my brother, one wasn't home, because we didn't know where he is. Another was hiding. My father, you know –

Q: Why was he hiding?

A: He was hiding all the time, you know, because he was afraid of – that he going – they going to arrest him.

Q: For why?

A: Russian.

Q: Yeah, why?

A: You know, because –

Q: Why would they arrest him?

A: They – you don't know what th – what the reason, you know, you don't know what the – what – you know, but he was hiding all the time. Yeah – yeah, but that time he was home, you know.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Okay.

A: But they – you don't know what reason, and they arrest you. You don't know, maybe – why they tooked us? Give me a answer.

Q: Did – did anybody tell you? When they came in, in the middle of your house, did they say why you had to leave?

A: No. They didn't say nothing, where we live. That's what they says, to **Kraków**.

Q: I see. And that's it?

A: That's it. That's it, that we go to **Kraków**. And we didn't know nothing where we go, and we go to **Kraków**, sh – she – he ask, and my mother, she says that she's, you know, not too far from **Kraków**, **Bochnia**, she – I remember how she told him. She says oh, we are so nice, we going take you from where you came, over here. And that's it. That's what we knew. We didn't know nothing.

Q: And they said this in Polish, or in Russian?

A: Russian.

Q: Russian.

A: Russian, yeah.

Q: Okay. So you're on this truck, and you're going towards **Lwów**. Pick up the story from there, what happens then?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: When we went to **Lwów**, was – they bring us next to that big train, and that train was a animal train. You know, you saw on – on television and all this, and o – that they – transported –

Q: Cattle cars.

A: Yeah. And they – they, you know, were standing long, and we came and they make a groups, you know, when you work, they open that steel doors like that, and we walk. Was at least 71 you know, that car.

Q: Seventy people in one car.

A: Yeah, about 70 people they put – between 70, maybe some 80, some 60, you know, it's hard to tell, but in my, it was about 70. And all my family, and some, you know, colonies, most the colonies, because they took it whole colony, only that one man with the six children, they left. They didn't took him. But us, every person, they took it.

Q: So they emptied out the place?

A: Completely. Completely empty, everybody they took it. And the – and the – we been, you know, in the train. And we went – walk in in that train, and it was two **preach**(ph) – that train was so dirty, so oh my goodness, you couldn't believe it. And it was two **preachers**(ph), you know, one like that, and a higher, and – and there was space, and on the like corner was a – a still fireplace, a small, you know,

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

like round. And there was a hole next to that, you know, like a toilet for – for this.

And – but was so filthy and all this, and – and we been –

Q: When you say two – on the – on the sides, were these like planks?

A: Like wooden – wooden – wooden, that you can lay down, you know. They keep like chickens –

Q: Got it.

A: – or – or – or – or pigs, or something like on the –

Q: Got it.

A: – you – you understand this, **preacher**(ph), we call **preacher**(ph), I don't know you say in English to tell.

Q: Probably bunks, or – or –

A: Bumps, yeah, yeah, yeah, bumps, like bumps. Wooden –

Q: Bun – bunks, bunks, yeah.

A: Wooden, yeah, bump, yeah. They – you know. And then we walk in, and everybody was snick, you know, on – you know, where they find the place, and it was so sad, because one lady, she has a nerves attack. You know, how they have attack, that they don't move, only laying like – like they dead. And I was so scared and ever – and a – that children, and you s – very young children, they took it, everybody –



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Stop the camera please. **[break]** Okay, all right, so they took everybody.

A: Everybody, you know, the children, and my neighbors, they have – she has three children, and two weeks baby, and a peoples, blind, old, everybody. They didn't left nobody on that colony, nobody. And only except that one man, they di – I don't know what happened, but they too – didn't took him. And that – and we were in that train, and the – you know, that lady, she was laying down, you know, like that, and da – the rest, you know – you know, was some standing, some lay down, and all this. And after, you know, they closed the doors, and we been waiting when that train is going to start moving, and where is – is going go. And we have only spaces like that to – to see. And I remember how my mother, she says to my oldest brother, she says, **Franek**(ph), you are young, you are, you know, try to escape how – somehow, yeah, try to escape, you know, don't go with us, and my brother, he said Mom, I – I don't want to leave you, you know, with these children, and I'm going go where you go, and – and you know, and he stay. And then, you know, where – when train start going, and my mother, she says, **Franek**(ph), look awa – which way that train is heading. And after my brother was looking, looking, and he said, Mommy, is – is east – east, and we going to **Russia**. And he recognized, you know, the place, because from **Lwów** is not too far to – to cross the border of **Russia**, and he said, we are going to **Russia**. And what you going to do, it's a – it's

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

– it's **Russia**, and we have to somehow survive. And how we survive was, on beginning, was only with the sleeping, we been like sardines, completely sardine. And was, you know, very crowd wood, and we have some cover, you know, but we cover ourselves on the top, but on the bottom we didn't have enough clothes or everything for it, and we laying on that dirty, you know – and we slept, we didn't change never. You can't imagine – the only thing about, I'd – I go for five weeks in that train. And it was all kinds of people, they been mothers pregnant, they been sul – young chi – small children, babies, and all this. And we have only one a day cup of water, and cup of soup, and a little, you know, piece of bread, that's what we have. You couldn't wash yourself, you didn't change yourself, you didn't – you no – we didn't have nothing. You imagine be five weeks between so many people, and all this, with completely nothing. We couldn't wash a face, and you imagine babies? What the mother been doing with babies? Then I saw some later, you – you know, to the end of the journey, that some babies was bleeding, you know, from – because the mother didn't have no diapers, no powder, no cream, no nothing, because you know, how – you imagine, with no nothing, completely nothing, five weeks in the train. And look, about children, they – you can't move, you only was laying on that poor – **preach**(ph), or you standing, and that's it. And was terrible. But on beginning only, we been happy that we have that food, you know, besides

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

that. Then my mother always took off a little bit. She knew that it's going be long. She – we didn't know how long, where we were going to **Siberia**. Well, we didn't know that. But we only si – what brother said it, east. And – and she tried to, you know, only – only to feed us that we can survive one day and another and ano – but after, to the end, was all finish, we didn't have nothing, only that soup, you know, they – they been doing that on station, the train stopped, and they have huge bags, you know, food, with soup. And they come to that train, soldiers, and they ask two mens, with the pots like this, to go and take that soup, and after the – they been coming, and we been share in the – you know, with the small cups like that, and we share from one to another, and that's was ours food. You imagine? And a water, how much water you can have, you know, how you can wipe that child, or – or – or even drink, or some – you imagine five weeks, and we that dirty and cold, and – and to the ba – bathroom –

Q: Middle of winter.

A: – to the bathroom, yeah, was very – they says it was recording winter that time, when you – if you checked on the – you know. And – and the bathroom, and if some baby died, and you throw it through that hole. You know, that baby. Or –

Q: Were there a lot of dead – were – were there people dying?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Well, in my – in my place, one baby only, you know, but – but you see on – on beginning, what – in this school, and on this train, we saw so many babies and all this. But after, when we went to **Krasnovodsk**, and we left there, that train, you – you see not too many. And my neighbor, she lost three children when she reached the **Siberia**, on the way. She – she lost that three children. And – and it was terri – you – only you think how – if you go today, and sit in that train, you know, and even you can't sit, you know, normal, you have to lay down, because there's space – not – like a tall man, he couldn't sit. Only, you know, they most the time was terrible, terrible, you know, that journey. You – you – is not, you know, how you can explain to somebody? But you have to imagine, if you, you know, be in that place, and we been. It's not that we **[indecipherable]**. Then we came to **Krasnovodsk** so tired, so exhausting, so – and hungry and all this. Then they put us groups, and they give us one horse, and one s-slide, and we have to walk 300 miles to the destiny **[indecipherable]** to that camp. On the river, **Yenisei** river. You know where is the **Yenisei** river? Go **[indecipherable]**. On the **Yenisei** river, and we been walking every day for six days, we make that 300 **kilomeres**(ph). And they been doing like that that we walk, you know, one day, and we stay in some community, you know, someplace like a village, and they give us again soup. That soup they – was feeding us all the time from po – **Poland** to the **Siberia**. And they

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

give us a little piece of bread, and again that water, and we get up in the – early in the morning we have to get up, and again walk all day, all day, you didn't have nothing, completely nothing. And we been walking, that was – spring was coming, and I hear how the – all this mans been saying oh, y-you know, we walk in the water already. And they says, if that not break, that ice, and we could go over, you know, under the water –

Q: So you're walking on top of the river?

A: Oh – on top of the – on the ice. Because that place, when I was, was only one road, that was river. You couldn't – in summertime, you have to swim, you know, on something, and in wintertime you go on the ice. That's it, what we have. We didn't have no road, nothing, completely. And we walk like this, and was terrible. People was, you know, laying on the snow, and they said no, I am not going go any more. You go, I am not going go, and they lay down and – and die, you know, like that. And we been going. I walk all the time, all my day. My youngest sister, sometimes she sit on that sled, where they bi – they been exchange, you know, some little bit sit, and again walk, and another, and you know, we been doing – and they have put like for was 30 to 40 people, a group, one slide, you know, not – not [indecipherable] and we only put our stuff, you know, on this, and you know, and this way we been walking and walking, and you know, and I remember so good,

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

they give us, in the morning, you know, that soup, and that water. And to the destiny when – to that camp, we came like about three o'clock afternoon, you know, to that block.

Q: And were you guarded, were there guards with you?

A: Yeah, the – all the time was Russians to **Krasnovodsk**, and after **Krasnovodsk**, was Russian all the time. That train was guarded all the time. You – you couldn't escape for nothing, because if you escape, you be shot. They shoot.

Q: Was anybody who tried?

A: I didn't hear. I don't think that anybody tried.

Q: Okay.

A: Because if they try, maybe in another, you know, trains or something, I don't – but not – I didn't hear nothing about my train. But you know, if you escape, they all been – you have ammunition [**indecipherable**] walking constantly, and you know, you – you couldn't es – you know, if you escape maybe, I don't know. And when we went to the –

Q: Were there guards – were there guards while you were walking? When you were on –

A: Oh, oh, when we been walking, no, they stopped. But we have Russians, Ukrainians, who was live on **Siberia**, and they been with us.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: And were they –

A: Not any more soldiers, so –

Q: Okay, but were they official, were they policemen, were they just –

A: No, no, I think th – they been like normal people.

Q: Okay.

A: Like, I don't think they – they been like normal people, you know, they – they have that s –

Q: Sleds?

A: – slides, and a horse.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they told us where – where to stop, and after – where – what time wa – they wake us up, and they says, we start again. And he was like responsible for us, but not soldier.

Q: Okay.

A: At that time it wa – didn't have no soldier, no a-ammunition, I didn't see any ammunition later, and nothing to the – you know, when we been walking. And when we came, was three o'clock afternoon, and again we – we walked to that camp, and was, you know, two big mountains, and that camp was like on the – you know –

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: On the valley.

A: Valley. And my – that block, you know, how you say, that room, was nearly first when we came to that camp. And they give us, you know, was big place like – like this, that's all.

Q: Okay, so it's [indecipherable] okay.

A: And we walk in, and you should see, that was all – all the block, that was – maybe they built you know, for that prisoners in – in 18<sup>th</sup> century, or something. Was terrible, was – was smell, was –

Q: What was it made of?

A: Pardon me?

Q: Was it wooden?

A: Wooden, yeah, from wood.

Q: It was wood, okay.

A: It was making, you know, with that woods, yeah, and you know, and roof was with something they – they put the woods. Is all woods, you know, the – you know, like – you know, like that round, big woods?

Q: Logs.

A: Log. Logs, yeah, yeah.

Q: Logs, okay.



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: That's logs, yeah, was. And we walk in, and was **preachers**(ph) again, was one and two.

Q: Bunks, bunks.

A: Funk.

Q: Bunks.

A: Funks?

Q: No, bunks. **B-u-n-k-s**.

A: Oh, oh.

Q: Bunkbed.

A: Oh, oh, bunks, bunks, bunks, yeah, yeah.

Q: Bunks. Bunkbeds, mm-hm.

A: Yeah, yeah. Was two. And a – and a – and we been so tired, we sit down, and – and really very hungry. And Daddy was sitting over here, and my mother over

here, and – and he said to her, **Marisz**(ph), you know, today is Easter. And we don't have even, you know, drop of f – of bread or nothing, completely nothing.

We didn't have nothing, completely. And – and she says, yeah, **Janek**, you know, today is Easter, and she was crying so much, how many tears she – she put on

from, you know, 1940 to you know, that you can't believe it, and she cry. And we – nothing, you know, what are we going to do? And we went sleep like that. But

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

when we went sleep, was so many insects in that wood, you know, like oh my goodness, was like light, they been coming to ours hair, to ours face, and we been covered ourselves, we didn't know what to do with it, we been oy, oy, oy, you know, and smell, and all this. And we went to sleep, and the next day my father, he went and looking for somebody to – what we going to do? And then my father he went, and that **presidatel**(ph), that we call **presidatel**(ph) that – who was responsible for this camp, he – he said that he give him a bread, you know, 80 grams, but that bread, I don't know what kind of bread, from what they baked that bread and all this, you can't believe. Was very heavy, was like, oh, I don't know, I don't know, you can't imagine. I still thinking about this bread, how they been bake – I – and I was – that was, but anyway, we have bread, and – and you know, 80 grams, that was like – piece like this, and he broke for everybody. Then we have, next day, that bread. And – and water, we took snow and melted. We have, you know, little – like in **[indecipherable]**

Q: Kettle? A kettle?

A: Yeah, and one – and – and part on the top was standing. And we melt a little water, and we drink. And then, you know, that – next day pass like that, and after another day, there came two – three people came, and they says that they going to took us to the – split us to the jobs. You know, they going give everybody a job.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

First they says to my father, that you going go about six miles from here, and he going burn the wood for – you know, coal? You know how they burn the wood, is you cover that for – for burning.

Q: I don't understand.

A: For burning the – you know, in machines, like a trains, they have something, for coal.

Q: Well, you're burning –

A: The big blacks.

Q: Okay.

A: They burn slowly, and cover with the dirt, and that's – you know, burn slow enough that you have from that –

Q: Heat?

A: Heat, but how you call the –

Q: Wait, I don't – you see, if you're burning wood, it just burns.

A: No, but this is the – I-I don't think you saw all this.

Q: No.

A: A-And you cover with the dirt, and it burns slow, but it's not burning completely, only after you can use this pieces for burning, heating.

Q: Ah, okay, so he's creating something –

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Yeah.

Q: – that you can use to – to heat, in the future. Okay.

A: Heat, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's it, how you – I don't know.

Q: I don't know.

A: But the – they took him for that. And he has to work that night and day, because when start somewhere burning more, th – see the fire, he has to cover that. This is like – you know. And that was his job, he was so dirty over there, no water, no noth – oh my goodness, was terrible, because I visit him few times. And for my brother, my two sisters, they took it to **cole(ph) mile(ph)**. And is – was about 10 mile – 10 **kilomeres(ph)** from that place, from that barrack/

Q: Coal mine?

A: Yeah, cold mire.

Q: A coal mine.

A: No, a – a – gold.

Q: Gold mine.

A: Gold mile.

Q: Mine.

A: Mine, yeah. They went to that – you know, to work.

Q: Yeah, okay. Okay.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: And me, and another older my sister, they told us to go pat the trees, you know.

We pat the trees.

Q: You're 11 years old.

A: Yeah, 12, you – I was.

Q: Twelve.

A: Yeah. Cut the tree. But after two weeks, that **presidatel**(ph) that – who was responsible for us, he came to me and he said, don't come any more, because you are too young. But that day, he told me to go with the older sister to the field, you know, to the woods, and we cut the tree, you know – you know –

Q: With a saw.

A: Yeah, with a saw. And – and two sisters stay at home with my mother. And after two weeks, he said that I can't do it, and I stay with my mother. But and came springtime, and – and summer, then I was helping Mommy go to the – pick up some blueberries, some mushrooms. Then I go to my brother and sister, that they give me sometimes something, because they – they give them, you know, some food and all this. Then I went to the father, and sometimes something has to be repair, or something that Mommy repair, and I bring that. I was like a communicated between fa –

Q: You were the courier.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Courier, yeah, between Father and my sisters and my mother. And that summer I was doing like this. And I – sometimes I went to the little village to beg for food. Then I went, and sometimes I bring two, three potatoes, or something, to – you know, we can eat. And – and [indecipherable] we struggle. Bbut we have fish, you know, in that river, we have really very nice fish, and the people was caught that fish, and we – that fish help us survive, you know, that we se – we are alive today. If not after that fish, we'd be all starving to death over there. We didn't have really nothing, only – but that fish help us a lot. Was salmon and [indecipherable] fish and all this, and Mommy cook, you know, in the pot, and she give us and we ate, you know, once a day, or every second day, or something like that. And that was helping us through that, you know. And then c-came winter. Oh my goodness, you should see winter, oh, how much snow, we have more than five [indecipherable] of snow. That barrack was cover. If you camed, and you didn't see no – no camp, no nothing, you know. A-And we have to go up from the – you know, to – to up of – of – of the top of that snow, and we been walking on that snow. But when we came to **Siberia**, first, second day, they give us **valenki**, special shoes for **Siberia**, and they gi – they give us heavy clothes, like jackets, you know, heavy clothes and – and pants. And that was like on **Siberia** we been wearing this, night and day, completely. With that shoes, you feel so warm. If you went on normal shoes in the

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

winter, you'd be froze to death. You – you – you couldn't make it, you know, in normal shoes. But this **valenki**, they k – they keep you – you know that you – your feet wasn't frozen, and all this. But was so heavy winter, so much snow, so cold.

Oh my goodness, you – you – you couldn't believe it. But we survive, and after, on the spring, but you know, over there, we didn't have no communication, nothing, completely nothing. We didn't have even paper to – to write something. We didn't have no communication, we didn't know nothing what happen in the world.

Q: Did that – did that **priansudatel**(ph), the one who was the head of the camp, did he ever give an explanation as to why you were there?

A: No. They never talked to us. Never talk and they – they only, you know, talk what we supposed to do, and what you – you know, expect from us, and nothing.

You know, I – I was few times in that gold mine –

Q: Gold mine.

A: – mine, yeah –

Q: Yeah.

A: – gold mine. Then I saw, you know, never conversation between them, they all only came after shift finish, and they took it, the gold. I saw how much the – they – you know, sometimes there was so much gold. He took it and **[indecipherable]** and he left. No conversation, no nothing between, you know. Only what they have

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

to do it, and he only watched them what to do, but that gold mire you – was so primitive, that people – my sister, you know, they work nearly in – in the water like this. And they throw that, you know, dirt on the – on that slide, was slide like that, with water, and they ha-have to throw it on that, and was – water was wiping –

Q: Washing.

A: – wa-washing – washing enough that the gold was – was, you know, in the bottom, and this way you know the – but they work like 10 full hours on all day, so that my cousin die over there, my godmother brother, the son die over there, and another from, you know, something fall, or this. They didn't care, you know, they make only this. You die, you die, you not, then – then it's okay. And they been worked so terrible, you can't even imagine somebody make that picture of that gold mire. They have terrible work, and they work all the time, you know. And then it comes spring, and that time they send me to the **kolkhoz**, you know, they says that I have to work.

Q: What's a **kolkhoz**?

A: **Kolkhoz** like a – like a farm. You know, in – in – you know, they call – youn – you know, the **kolkhoz**, like a farm. Big farm, but belongs to the – you know government, not to the people.

Q: Okay.



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: You – some name is of that

Q: I think in English it's called a collective farm.

A: Collective farm, yeah, yeah, that's it.

Q: Yeah.

A: Collecting farm. And then I went over there, and I am – you know, pick up some wood – you – you know, I work, you know, like in the garden. And the rest was still working, you know, and doing the same thing what they – what – when they came, and everybody, you know, getting so – dying people, the children, die, they – they – in winter they couldn't bury them, that they keep them, you know, under the snow, then after, you know, oh my goodness, was terrible, terrible, look, and everybody getting [indecipherable] and more – more tired, more – you know, was – was terrible. And after, you know, one day, I was over there, and my sister came to me, and she says, **Helen**, come on quick, because we are free, we are leaving. And oh my goodness, you should see, you – you – you can't imagine that moment when – when that happen, when the – and the – we didn't know what – what – you know. But anyway, she took me, she says, [indecipherable] we have a little boat on that river, because I told you, that was only one road. We have a boat like for seven, eight people on that boat, and they give us, you know, one sack like that, with the dry bread, skin bread. Not bread, but the skin from the bread.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: The crust.

A: Crust, yeah.

Q: The crust.

A: They gave us that in bag like this, and we sit down on that woo – boat.

Q: Boat.

A: And the horse pull us. Horse was swimming, and he pulled up –

Q: The boat.

A: – that boat, on that river. And we been going the same distance on that boat, how we went on the distance of the walking, you know, on the – you know, bigger. And night and day. And – and my brother –

Q: That poor horse.

A: Yeah, two – you know, the horse, after you know, we have a bigger boat, he brought us to bigger boat, and that boat was on steam. Must be, you know – you know –

Q: Okay.

A: – and was much bigger, was – over there is at least 50 – 50 people – maybe 40 - 50, you know, on that boat.

Q: Do you know why they set you free?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: We didn't know nothing. Nothing completely. I tell you, we didn't have any news, nothing tha – nobody can imagine, but we didn't know. **Russia** didn't tell us nothing. That **presidatel**(ph), they never, you know – we didn't ha – have nothing, nothing. But you know, when we been free, we knew that we can leave that camp, and go, you know, back, you know, but what came to ours mind first? That we're going back to **Poland**. Nothing else. When we go to ours houses, that's it. And my father was so happy, because he was so disappointed that he left that, you know, trees. Fruit trees, and all this – we have really nice place, you – you should see, really, we have very nice place. And – and we – we only been happy that we going, and we go to – straight to **Poland**, that's it. And we go on that boat one, and after another boat, and then we go to **Krasnoyarsk**. And in **Krasnoyarsk** is train on the station, a train. And Daddy went to buy the tickets to **Poland**. And –

Q: Did he have money?

A: – he went to buy the tickets to **Poland**, they told him, you can't go to **Poland**, because is the war between **Germany** and **Russia**. That time we – we find out this. And he came to – to my mother, and I remember how he said, he said, **Marisza**(ph), we can't go to **Poland**, because is the war, and they told us to go south. And oh my goodness, what was disappointment. Oh my goodness, what – that we can't go to **Poland**, and –

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: You can't go home.

A: – and we have to go again, you know, and my father, he said, my goodness, where we going go? And they says that you – we have to go to **Uzbekistan**, you know, south. And then what? We have to go, we have to go, we know – we don't want to stay in – in **Krasnoyarsk**, you know, on **Siberia**. And then Daddy, my father, he bought the tickets.

Q: How did he have money?

A: Well, he got the money, you know, from **Poland**, when we been at home, and he sold few things, and he has the **rubles**, you know, the Russians money.

Q: Ah, so he kept it with him.

A: And he – and he have that money, yeah, he have some money, you know, in **Russia**. Yeah, and – and thanks God that he has that money, and he bought the tickets to **Samarkande(ph)**.

Q: Okay.

A: **Samarkande(ph)** in **Uzbekistan**. And he bought this ticket, and we went on that train, but we been so happy, because was normal train, we are free, we are – even if we hungry or dirty, or thirst – but – but we are ourselves, we are free now. We can go from the train, we can buy something if we have money. We have this, we have that, and that was so nice pleasure. Only we been disappointed that we

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

can't go back to **Poland**. We been positive that we only going to **Poland**. But after, you know, that journey was long, you – you imagine **Krasnoyarsk** and – and –

**Q: Samarkand.**

**A: – Samarkande(ph).**

**Q: And when was this? When did this take place? When wi – wi –**

**A: When –**

**Q: – what – do you remember the month?**

**A: That was – that was September. That was ju – July, September, we – we came to – to Samarkande(ph).**

**Q: And so this was what year?**

**A: 1942.**

**Q: 1942?**

**A: Forty-one. No, '41.**

**Q: 1941.**

**A: Forty-one. Yeah, we went through this winter, and summer. I was working the garden, and all this, and she came, my sister, and that was June, July.**

**Q: Okay.**

**A: We left September, you know, to – to Samarkande(ph).**

**Q: Okay.**

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: In September, October, we been in **Samarkande**(ph).

Q: Okay.

A: And – and over there they put us in the **kolkhozes**, you know, how you say –

Q: Collective farms

A: Collecting farm, yeah. They – they put us in a collecting farm, and that was –  
yeah, is collecting farm. The **Uzbekistans** people.

Q: Okay.

A: And they give us a little **kipiytk**a(ph) we call it, **kipiytk**a(ph) in – in  
**Uzbekistan**, the name of – of the house – place where we live.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, they have like – you saw in –

Q: Tell me what it looks like.

A: You know, like when you see now **Iraq**, the fight, and all this, and that little gi –  
you know, houses with – make from the –

Q: Mud?

A: – mud, and all this, like little houses, like –

Q: Okay.

A: – you go, no doors, you know, and –

Q: Okay.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: – something like that we live in – in – in something like this. We have only one room in that, you know, **kolkhoz**, and – and – and a porch. And after, you know, that time, I met two Jewish. You know, the Uzbekistans, the – nobody talk Russian, only one **presidatel**(ph), he talk Russian that we could commun – communicated with them, and the rest **Uzbekistan**, they didn't speak eng – Russian.

Q: Did you understand Russian?

A: Oh yeah, I speak fluently.

Q: How did you learn it?

A: In **Russia**.

Q: Well, you see –

A: From Russian people.

Q: Oh, I see. So when you were –

A: I – I – I – I learn so good that some people, they didn't know that I am Polish, or – or Russian. I – I speak fluently because I have kwa – I was communicated with the – with the Russian people.

Q: Okay.

A: And I – you know, from **Poland**, I was study Ukrainian. And after, you know, Russian. And when the he – I have lessons that time with – he teach us, he – he spoke to us Russian. We have Russian lesson.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Where?

A: You know, when I went to school from October to – to February.

Q: Ah, that teacher who had been – yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: [**indecipherable**] teacher, yeah, he teach us Russian.

Q: Okay.

A: Then after, when I went to **Russia**, I – I learn so quick.

Q: Okay.

A: And I speak fluently Russian, that's, you know, no problem for me –

Q: I see.

A: – was I – I – with Russian language. And we only spoke to that pre – **presheetal**(ph), you know, eng – Russian language. And he told us always what we supposed to do, and – but you know, my two sister, they been so sick, they been so sick they couldn't oh, walk or nothing. They be so skinny like **skelets**(ph).

Q: Skeletons, yeah.

A: They, you know, only the bones and – and skin wa – they been so sick, oh my goodness. And – and my mother, and the two youngest sister, and we been so starving over there, was so much sickness in that south, you know, around **Samarkande**(ph). So many people was dying, Polish people dying over there, because you know, they been so tired after **Siberia**, and was cold over there, and all



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

this. And after, you know, when they came over here, was warm and another kind of everything, you know, the – the – you know, the **[indecipherable]** and the food, and – and disease, all kinds, you know, the – we been sick for that – thi – oh, ye – oh my goodness, what is in English, I don't know.

Q: Say it in Polish.

A: My husband was sick **[indecipherable]**. Oh my goodness. Maybe that's come. See ma – see it's – you getting old – get old days, oh my goodness, it's worse and worse. **[Speaks Polish]**

Q: Flu.

A: Flu, like yeah. Like a flu, yeah –

Q: Influenza.

A: – all kinds, yeah, all kinds sickness.

Q: Okay.

A: And it was very bad, and my mother, she start thinking, if we not starve really, to death, you know, in that camp, in that **Uzbekistan**, then she send two my youngest sister to Russian orphanage, because in orphanage they have more food than all this. She wanted send me too, but she says, **Helen**, you stay with me, because I can't manage with these two very sick sisters.

Q: Sisters.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: And my father didn't feel either good, and somebody has to work in that **kolkho**

–

Q: Collective farm

A: Yeah, because in other way they didn't give you nothing, completely nothing.

And I have to work, and I was working over there. I was, you know, working on that field, I was digging, I was doing all kinds of work. And after when I work, they give me a little rice, or they give me, you know, few potatoes, or they give me some, you know, gr-grapes, you know, because they growing grapes over there.

Q: Right.

A: They give me always something and I bring to Mommy, and Mommy cook and – and they have at least something. Because if nobody was working, they wouldn't give you nothing. You have to work another way, you know. That – you know, my mother, she says, you stay with me because you have to help me. And I was, thanks God, most healthy child in that family. I was all the time was helping Mommy to – to help with – with this. And after – you know, we been so – so run down with everything, and Mommy has a few things, I don't know what she has, because you know, you – we have in **Poland** pretty nice clothes. Really, if comes to that, Mommy always, you know, buy, and you know, we have nice shoes, and all this. And she packed all this, and we have few things from **Poland**. And she says, you

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

know, to my oldest sister, you know what, I have few things. Maybe you going go to **Samarkande**(ph) and sell that, and we going have few, you know, that money. And we can get something, because we going starve to death. And I went with my sister, she took it – that – oh, you know, on the –

Q: Knapsack, yeah.

A: – back, yeah. And we walk in **Samarkande**(ph), and we're looking for market. When we going **[indecipherable]** and sell this? And you know, somebody came, and they cut that, and took it, everything. And we lost everything. We been so upset. She is crying, I am crying. How we go back to home? What Mommy going to say? And this and that. But you know what happen? What happen miracle. We – we're walking on that, you know, sidewalk, and we're crying. And my sister, she says, **Helen**, look. This is a Polish soldier. Look, he got the uniform, Polish uniform. I says, yeah, **Hanya**(ph), he got the Polish uniform, look what he is doing over here. And – and **Hanya**(ph), she says, I am going to ask him what he's doing over here, a Polish soldier. And – a-and she went to him and – and ask him, I se – he said what – and she says, he said to her, why you don't know that we are, you know, starting to organize Polish army over here, and – and then we are leaving, and you know, about General **Anders** he said to her. And he said, oh, you don't know nothing? And my sister, she says no, we don't know nothing, we live on that

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

– you know, **kolkhoz**, and we don't know nothing. And he said, go and pack quick your stuff, and go to **Samarkande(ph)**, take a train and go to the **Kermine**. And – and he said, right away –

Q: The what? The terminal?

A: **Kermine**.

Q: **Kermine**?

A: The place. **Kermine** in **Russia** is the city.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: **Kermine**. From – from **Samarkande(ph)** to **Kermine**. And my goodness, we been so happy, and – and – and you know, and the ha – and my sister, she says, come on **Helena**, we going run, quick, you know, tell to Mommy, pack, you know, and we are going to – to take a train, and we go to **Samarkande(ph)**. And we went to ko – you know, to Mommy, and it's – right away we pack, and we go to **Samarkande(ph)**. And – but these two sisters, they been in orphanage, and my mother, when we been going, we – we took it th-that **arba(ph)**, you know, the – what we travel in – in **Uzbekistan**, they have a big wheel, and the [speaks foreign language]

Q: How do you say it in Russian?

A: In **Russia**, they say **arba(ph)**.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Okay.

A: **Arba**(ph).

Q: Ah, o-okay, it was a – it was something on wheels?

A: You know, make from the wood, like place like this.

Q: Okay.

A: And there's a big wheel one, and another, and the [**speaks foreign language**]

Not a left one – not a left one, but the – the **carmelon**(ph)?

Q: Uh-huh, the camel.

A: **Carmelon**?

Q: The camel pulls it.

A: The – the – pulls this.

Q: Okay.

A: You saw that.

Q: I've never seen it.

A: Oh my God, you don't watch **TV**? Oh my goodness. And when you watch that war in **Iraq**, and all this you could watch – see all these things, and oh [**indecipherable**] watch this. That's the – **Uzbekistan** is over here, and **Afghanistan** over here, they're –

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: I can't picture it in my mind. But any rate, it's something that you either sit in, or that you put your things in?

A: Yeah, we put things on this, and we have to drive on this, because was too far, you know.

Q: Got it.

A: With the stove and all this –

Q: Yeah.

A: – to **Samarkande**(ph). We – we used, you know, something like that. And a – and we been passing that orphanage, and my mother, she says, oh I am going go and say bye to them, and – because you know, they going cry and all this, they -- that I don't visit them, and you know. But we says no, no, Mommy, because if you go, they going cry, and what we going to do anyway? Still don't know where we going, what is going happen to us, and – and anyway, she didn't go. But, after, I tell you. And we went to **Samarkande**(ph), and no money. We didn't have no money, because Daddy spent all money to travel, because that was a long way from, you know, **Uzbek**(ph). And was so many, you know. And we didn't have no money, no nothing, because it wa – you know, they – the stolen from us, this, and – and we for – nothing. And we went to **Samarkande**(ph), and we are sitting on the train station, and wit – waiting for – on the train, and for second train. And we are

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

going, usually I go, or my mother, because the sister was both very sick and my brother – my father. And we asking them, you – would you take us, you know, to that train, would you take us? No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Three days we been sleeping over there, day and night. Hungry like – like completely, you know. Sometimes the train was passing, and they throw some piece of bread, or you know, or crumbs or something, we pick up and eat that. And you know, we been starving, and it was – y-you know, that was close to December, you know, all this we been called, because one time I remember the snow was little bit on ours top, but anyway. And we been thinking, what are we going to do? We going to – no, no, what are we going to do? And one train with the Russian soldiers, was going. And I went and I – the s-soldiers was standing, was stopped that train, and he was standing, and I to – and I went to the – and I say, I told him, I cry, and I beg him, I says, I beg you, I – you know, we are three days over here –

**End of File One**

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

**Beginning File Two**

A: – and we have to get to the **Kermine**, and we don't have no pen, and no – and we hungry, and all this. I cried to him, and I beg him, I says, don't leave us over here, because we be dead, you know, all this. And he said [**speaks foreign language**] and he said, go quick, quick. You know, because train is going stop there, and I wa – I – you know, because it was close to the train. And we grab all the stuff, and you know, we were g – walk in that train, and he said, listen, when that – some conductor going come and check, then I'm going put you, everyone, somewhere hiding you, you know, on the – under the – you know, corner over here, over there. And he was so nice, I wish that man went to the heaven. And he did that, and we came to the **Kermine**, and the – he said where is **Kermine**, and – and we left that train, and I never going forget him, because you know, he did so – so – so many people did so good for us. And I always think about him, I hope he is in heaven, because I don't know if he's alive any more, because he was like maybe 40 that time, or – or – or more. But he was so nice, that's what he help us. And we came to **Kermine**, and from that station, we have to walk two **kilometes**(ph) to ours camp, when is the tents was – you know, tents. And over there was like people, which they been waiting for transport, go to **Krasnovodsk – Krasnovodsk**,



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

**Caspian** Sea, and then to **India**. And we been in group General **Anders**. That group –

Q: I see.

A: – that you know, that General – General **Anders**, he took care of us. And you know what happen again, is – is big problem again for us. And we went to that camp, we been so happy, my goodness, we have food, and you know, if somebody's sick, we have medicine, because you know, the – they took care of us, the English government. He ge – he pay money, and he took care of that group, what is General **Anders** bu – was responsible. And you know what happen? They take only this families which they have somebody in the army of General **Anders**. And we didn't have nobody.

Q: What happened with your younger brother?

A: My – m-my younger brother, he was in the army, 1939, and he escaped to **Romania**, and he was, you know, in **Hungary**, and after, I think he went to **England**. We didn't know nothing about him.

Q: That's the older brother. When –

A: Second brother. But the – another, he le – he stay in the **Russia**. When we have that boat, he couldn't fit that boat, and he stayed to wait for another boat. And he said, well, I'm going reach you, you know, yeah.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Right.

A: But he never did.

Q: You never –

A: Never. Never, and I never – we never saw him after – I tell you later. And you know, and when ma – my mother, she went to register, and they says, who you have in the – in the army? My mother, she says, I have two sons, but they are not over here only, you know, one is I don't know where, and another too, because you know, he stay in **Siberia**. And I don't know wa – you know, what happened. But I have wa – one in the army, you know, the youngest, he was, you know, in the army. And oh my goodness, one transports goes, and another goes, and third goes, and we are staying. And my mother, she gets crazy. Oh, what she went through, you don't know. And she was – what transport came, and she was asking somebody, if somebody can witness that she has a – a son in the army, but he's not over here, and even they can let us go. And then she find, thanks God, somebody on the st-station, and he said that he is in city. Because when we been – we been on, you know, place, they put camps, you know, tents, and we been like you know, people only coming and going. But was city, **Kermine**, and was about six miles from – from that camp.

Q: Yeah.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: But all this color station, you know, color? **Carmela** – oh yeah, I was – yeah.

See, I'm –

Q: It's okay, it's difficult to –

A: [**indecipherable**] you know. And we went to that city, to met this person, and he's supposed to sign for Mommy that – that she has a son, you know, in the army, and all this. But when –

Q: E-Excuse me. Is this a person who actually knew this?

A: Knew – she – he is from ours **kolonia**. Ours neighbor.

Q: Got it. Okay.

A: He was ours neighbor, and he was like working with officers over there, you know, Polish officers in **Kermine**.

Q: Got it.

A: In that office.

Q: He could – he couldn't vouch.

A: Yeah.

Q: He couldn't vouch for her.

A: Yeah, yeah. And – and we went over there, and he was so happy to see us, and we are – we been so happy to see him too. And you know, he gave Mommy meat, and a little wine. The meat, corned beef. And Mommy ate, and I ate only that

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

corned beef, but I didn't have no wine. And – and so we been so happy, we coming home, you know, to that camp, and oh, we are going tomorrow, and we going have everything. Mommy was, you know, cleaning ours hair, and this and that, and – and I remember how she say, oh tomorrow we going have a medicine, and priest, and we going have everything and food and everything, you know. Oh, oh, you know, listen, tomorrow we going have everything. And you know what happen? I'm in the night, she's crying, she's screaming. And Daddy, he's asking her, **Marisza**(ph), what happen? She says, oh, I have big pain. And – and again, she's, you know, screaming, you know. And again, oh, I have big pain. And this morning we have to go two miles to that train and go, or live, you know for good in **Russia**. And she get up, she couldn't you know, do something, but we help her with that, what we have over there, and you know. And we are walking. One sister, she couldn't walk nearly, and another sister was in the hospital, on the train station. They have, you know, like a – a hospital, that she – we supposed to take her from there, straight to the train. And we have to walk that two miles to that train. That one sister, me, Daddy – Father and Mother. And they – we walk, and I walk next to Mommy, and my mother she walks like five, six steps, and falls down. And again, I-I says, Mommy, Mommy, wake up, wake up, stand up, stand up, is not too far, you know, to train, come on and walk. And my father and my mo – sister, they

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

walk ahead, because they have all this stuff, and I was one that only watch my mother. And then we walk, walk, walk, and I am so happy, oh she's doing good, she's doing good. Again, she falls down, and again, you know, the same thing. And – and – and after was like a higher, we walk higher, and over here was a – a deep, you know, pretty – not – but pretty d-deep. And walk on the top, and she falls down, and she went to down.

Q: She rolls down.

A: Down. And – and I – I went, and I start screaming to Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, you know, Mommy's over there. And Daddy turn around, and he see that I have big problem with Mommy. And he came, and he called that **arba**(ph), you know, that's what I told you that **[indecipherable]**

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. He – he call and one **Uzbeks** was coming, you know, o-on the street. And he call him, call him, and he came. And he said, look, the lady laying, you know, on the **[indecipherable]** you know, help me. Take her to the train. And that **Uzbek** help Daddy, and I helped them too, and we put Mommy you know, on that, and he bring her to the station, you know. And after he put her, you know, on the –

Q: On the platform?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: – you know, on the platform, and I am laying and kneeling, you know, with her, and all this, and Mommy, Mommy, you know, wake up. Mommy, wake up, and – and this and that, and she – she is nothing, she is, you know, nothing. And I said to Daddy, what are we going to do? I am not going to leave her over here, I am not going to leave her over here. And Daddy, he said **Helen**, what are you going to do, you going to die over here, there's nobody. That was last, that – you know

**[indecipherable]** and last train. Last transport.

Q: Transport.

A: Nothing. Was finish. And – and you know, and the da – a-and I says no, no, and she didn't move nothing, you know, completely. She closed her eyes, and I wipe her, you know, because was dust and all this. Wi-Wipe her, you know, the mouth, and you know, and at – the train start moving, and I says no, and Daddy grab me for the hand, and he pull me to the train, and I left her. After, when I look at the sun, you know, and look at that place, and I thought, my poor mother, maybe the **[indecipherable]**. Who is going buried her? What is going to happen to her? Was the worst part of my life, to – you know, that part. And I – we went to **Krasnoyarsk**, and a – you know, that my sister was very sick. She was again, you know, and another, she nearly couldn't walk, and was always like that. If you couldn't walk yourself, you stay. They didn't took you. They watch. If you can

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

walk yourself, that's okay. If you don't, they left, because they been afraid of disease. They been afraid, they didn't want it because they thought if you go and die on that, they have problem in the train, or both, or anything. They didn't took you.

Q: Who were – who – who were – who was they? Was that the British authorities?

A: You know, they be responsibility. Now is Polish people they been responsibility.

Q: I see.

A: Y-You know, the govern – English governor support everything, because we didn't have nothing. They – they feed us, they clothes us, they medicine, everything was English government. But Polish people over here from **Kermine**, is not all the time Polish people.

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: Only from **Kermine**. They been responsibility for Polish people. Polish people, yeah, been responsible.

Q: Okay, I have to – I have to interrupt here for a second, because I want to find out, very briefly, what happened to various family members. Because you have such a large family, and now, by the time you're telling me this part of the story, so many of them aren't there any more.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Yeah.

Q: So I want to go back –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and I will repeat what I think you've told me.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, your younger brother escaped, and he never went – was deported to **Siberia**, he was somebody who ran to **Romania** and joined the Polish army.

A: That's second brother.

Q: The second brother. And he ended up in **England**.

A: Yeah.

Q: But you didn't know that then.

A: No.

Q: Your oldest brother, when your mother told him to run –

A: Yeah.

Q: – did not. Came with you –

A: No.

Q: – was there at the camp, and couldn't fit on the boat –

A: Yeah.

Q: – to come with you.



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Yeah.

Q: And so he was going to come later, and you never heard from him again.

A: Never show up, yeah.

Q: Okay. So that leaves six children –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and your parents.

A: Yeah.

Q: All right. So you come to **Samarkand** and you're so hungry, you can't feed them all. So two girls are in the orphanage.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And you – they're the youngest two?

A: A-And wa – one, that oldest was sick, and that marry was sick, that's was two.

Q: Okay.

A: I told you, when we went from **Samarkande**(ph) to **Kermine**, then we have this two, and me and my parents. Yeah, okay.

Q: Okay, wait a minute now, no, I'm still –

A: Yeah, yeah, okay.

Q: [**indecipherable**] it's still – so there's six girls, and two parents, eight people.

A: Yeah.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Two are in the orphanage.

A: Yeah.

Q: So that makes six people.

A: Yeah.

Q: Then that's four girls.

A: Yeah.

Q: And two of those four girls are sick.

A: Two – two girls were sick, one was married, then she was in another **kolkhoz**.

Q: Oh, she was married?

A: Yeah.

Q: She was married.

A: She was in another **kolkhoz**, yeah, yeah.

Q: And she was in another **kolkhoz**. And –

A: She was married. And – and two sis – **Hanya**(ph), the oldest –

Q: Yeah?

A: She was with me, all the time. Second was married, then she was another –

Q: In the **kolkhoz**.

A: – **kolkhoz**, but she was on **Siberia**, the same place when we are all the time.

Q: Okay.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: That's why I count her, because she's a sister. And another sister, **Marisza**(ph), she was very sick. That's what – she was in that hospital when we supposed to take her –

Q: Right.

A: – to that, you know, train.

Q: Okay.

A: And me, and these two.

Q: And these two.

A: You have six.

Q: Yeah.

A: Okay.

Q: So we have six, but two of them are left in the orphanage.

A: Two. These two.

Q: Yes, they're left in the orphanage, so –

A: They – the – we don't know – I don't have nothing to do in **Kermine** with them, nothing.

Q: Okay, got it.

A: They are there, in orphanage.

Q: Right. And so there are three girls left.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: Two girls, because that one is married. She wasn't with me, you know, in **Kermine**.

Q: That's where I get confused.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's where I get confused.

A: And only oldest, and that before me, **Maria**.

Q: **Maria**, and you are together with your father?

A: That three, yeah. Five of us.

Q: Uh-huh, okay, got it.

A: Five.

Q: Got it.

A: Okay?

Q: Got it, got it.

A: Now you understand, yeah.

Q: Now I understand.

A: And these two is seven, and that brothers and one sister, yeah, is –

Q: Got it, okay.

A: Yeah. Then the – you know, and we go to – to **Krasnoyarsk – Krasnovodsk**, you know, on the **Caspian** sc – Sea.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Right.

A: And –

Q: **Caspian** Sea, mm-hm.

A: Yeah. And this sister that you know, she – she was on the train, she walk in, and she was on the train, but she was very, very sick. And there another. And you know in **Krasnoyarsk** is the boat, and we have to go to the boat. My father, he went himself. The – the oldest sister, I help her to walk into the boat. You know, I took her, you know, I was much – she was tall. I was much younger, and it was a bar – barrier over here like that to the boat, when you walk –

Q: Right.

A: – you know, and we be like over there, and my sister that very sick was over there, very sick. She do not stand up on feet, or nothing. And I – and I says to – and boat is leaving. Leave – we don't leave, then we going be starve again, you know, again, what we going to do? Then I took it that older sister, and I says, **Hanya**(ph), hold me, and hold the hand over there, and slowly, slowly we going walk to the boat, and you know, and we did that. And we both went and we fall both from this. We couldn't, you know, walk any more, you know?

Q: And what about the sick sister?

A: And this when she left. I don't know nothing to today about her.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: You mean, she was left there?

A: Left. I couldn't – I couldn't manage, you know, that way. I couldn't manage. And look what I left over here. And another. And you know, on that boat, you know, I fall down, and I was, you know, that we always going on the boat, you know, was, you know, dirt. And I fall down, that was – I was dead from that, and a one man – was like flies was all over people laying, you know, like off of that, you know, on that boat. And I was laying over there, and after the marine walk, a-and he wake me up, and he said, wake up, you know, what – look what happen, you can fall down and you'll be dead. And I wake up, and I have a dirty clothes over here, because I even didn't care, you know, where I fall down, we fall. And you know, after, when I wake up, and we came to the **Pahlevi**, and they took it my father and my sister, that I even didn't know they took them to hospital. And I am alone like a finger, you know, in **Pahlevi**. Nothing, nobody. I don't have nobody, and you know what happen? I – I – I was waiting for my sister from orphanage, because that man, or that [indecipherable] what we went to **Kermine**, what he give to Mommy, that wine and all this, he promise Mommy that he is going go to that orphanage, and going take them and put them on the transport, and after, when we go first transport, they going come another transport, and we going met all in **Pahlevi**.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: And where is **Pahlevi**, what –

A: **Pahlevi** is **India**.

Q: It's in **India**?

A: Yeah, **India**.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, **Kaspijskie** Sea.

Q: That's right, **Caspian** Sea.

A: And – yeah, and the port is **Pahlevi**.

Q: Okay. I want to interrupt right now. How is it that your mother didn't take the two little girls in the orphanage with her?

A: Yeah?

Q: Why not stop and just take them with you?

A: I told hi – I told you that we didn't want it. We talked to her, and we says no, don't take them, don't take them –

Q: Why?

A: – because – I don't know what happened, I don't know. Because, you know, sometimes you doing something that we – we been so upset later. If we knew that this happen to my mother, we would take – we didn't know where we go, what's going, you know? I don't know. You – you know, you sometimes doing things that

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

you not supposed to, but you do it. And you know when my mother, she wanted jump, and – and go, and she says, I'm going tell them bye, you know, and kiss them. And we – we all – me and my sister and – and my father says, an – no, no, don't go, don't – and you know, that's what happen. We – we been afraid that they going cry so much for us. And – and they been so upset later, they t – they cried. They – they told me, you know, when that man came, because you know, they looking for Mommy, because she visit them every day. But the – when they didn't see Mommy, and all this what happened, and after the man came, you know, picked them up and put them on that train, and he said, oh your Mommy's okay, because he didn't know that she died. And she's okay, and you going join now Mommy, and all this. And when they came, you know, that time I was alone in **Pahlevi**, and I was looking for them. And they came, next day, like he said, next transport.

Q: Right.

A: And you know, and I'm see the transport came, and the people start coming, and I'm looking for them, looking, and they notice me, and they run to me, where's Mommy, where's Mommy, where's Mommy? And I says no, is no Mommy, no, you know. And then, you know, I – a-and – and they says, where's **Hanya**(ph), where's you know, **Marisza**(ph), where's, you know, everybody? I says no,



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

nobody, is only me. And I says, you have to be only with me. And she says, what we going to do, what we – I says, I don't know. And – and after, you know, they – the lady came because they take her – you know, care of – of us, and I have, you know, I get malaria over there, I was very sick. The – the one nurse, she find me on the sand, I was laying, I was shaking, all this. And I have malaria, and – and she took me to, you know, give me some medicine. And I says to her that only three of us, I have two younger sister and I am sick. What are we going to do? And she says, don't worry, I'm going find for you orphanage. And after maybe two, three, four hours, she came with the lady from the orphanage. But I – when she told me orphanage, I thought, oh my goodness, I'm not going home to orphanage, I am not, never, never. And I'm crying, and I says no, I am going take my sister, and I am going from – you know, take care of all of them, and they not going see any more orphanage. And s – one soldier, he walk on that sidewalk, and he notice that I am fighting with – you know, that I am crying and I talk to this lady, and all this. And that lady, she says to him, look, that's the [indecipherable], you know, that lung – lung – young girl, she want to take that young girls and go for herself, you know, she going take care of all th – look, look at her, what she's – what she wants to do. And that soldier, he saw me, he took me, you know, in his arms, and he said, stop crying, stop crying. You are disappointed at all this, you – you – right now you are

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

not okay. And he said, you have to go to orphanage, you know how much – we don't know where you're going go, we don't have a place to go, you have to travel a lot. You – you – you don't know, you know, how you can take care of this children, you know, sisters, and you have to join the orphanage, and they going take care of you, and you going follow them, and – and everything. And after – I didn't have no choice, and I – I went, and I says okay, and that lady, she took us to that orphanage. And that lady she – with that lady, I traveled to **Teheran**. And after – I didn't know where we are going, but I traveled to **Teheran**. And you know, in **Teheran**, one day there was 80 children orphanage. You couldn't see that children, how poor they are, how sick they been, oh my goodness. And – and she left us like about one and a half mile from the city, you know, th-the trucks was coming, and the leave the people, you know, farther. And after somebody was coming from the cit – you know, city, and they took them, and they –

Q: Bring them.

A: – well, put them, you know –

Q: Yeah.

A: – what they supposed to. And that was in the morning they put us, you know, on that per – sent over there, you know, all these children on the sand we sit down.

And – and she says, I'm going go to the city, and soon I'm going come back and

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

they going take you, and you wait only for me. And she went. It was like maybe 10 o'clock in the morning. And we are waiting, it's hot, and waiting and waiting and hungry, and thirsty and kids they crying. And I was nearly oldest in that orphanage, and was maybe five, you know, in my age. And – and we are, you know, talking to them, and trying, you know, and start, you know, dark. And the lights show in that city, and nobody's coming, nobody's taking us. And – and I talked to one boy, he – he was [indecipherable] he was very nice boy, and another girl. And I says, listen, we must go over there where is that lights, and looking for somebody, why she's not coming take us, you know, why –

Q: So there was no adult with you?

A: No.

Q: No adult?

A: Only – only her. Only her. She was only her responsible for the 80 children.

And – and we are waiting for her and waiting, and – and a – and a –

Q: Wait, excuse me again. When you say only her, and you're waiting for her, that means there was no adult with you –

A: No.

Q: – for those children? Was only –

A: No, only us.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: That is, only the children themselves were there.

A: Yeah, like me.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, but she – she told me and five of this older like me, take care of them, you know, where she going go.

Q: Right. Right.

A: You know [indecipherable]

Q: And she's not coming back.

A: And she not coming back. Then we took it, you know, light is o – you know [indecipherable] night is coming, was 11 o'clock at nighttime. And we went over there, and we walking on the street, and we don't know where to go, and to – for whom to look. And one – you know, always they have as tru – you know, s-security was working, you know –

Q: Right.

A: – all – all – every camp, they always have security something [indecipherable]. And the man is notice us, and he said, what you doing? Eleven o'clock and you are still out? You – you should sleep. And we told him, I says, sir, you know, 80 of children are waiting over there, and the lady who took responsibility for us, she's

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

supposed to come over here, and she's supposed to came with somebody e – and with us over here.

Q: What language did you speak?

A: Polish.

Q: Oh, so –

A: Polisher, he was Polish.

Q: So, was this a camp, or a city?

A: This is – was like a – in small city, camp. Like a – like camp in **Teheran**, you know, out of the **Teheran**.

Q: Okay. So you –

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, so you were –

A: Yeah, they have in **Teheran** camp like for Polish people.

Q: Got it.

A: But not inside camp, but –

Q: We got it.

A: – **Teheran**, you know.

Q: Okay, okay.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: You know, like a [indecipherable] and we have camp, you know [indecipherable] that Polish camp, and you know.

Q: Okay.

A: And – and he said – and I – and we told him. And he heard that we jump, and this and that, and you know, he call the one lady, sh – there was another orphanage over there, and she – he wake up that lady, and he said, oh, we have to make room, you know, it's 80 children is waiting over there. And where is that lady, where is that lady? And they couldn't find that lady, and – and this and that, but they didn't care about that lady, only they says, right away we go, and they took it, you know, truck. And – and – and run, you know, to these children, and they bring these children, and right away they give them, you know, food, and a – and a – you know, beds, and everything, we – and you know, to the – you know, to everything they took good care of you – of us. And another lady, which she has a orphanage, and they like, added us to that orphanage. But when they added, they be still working all together. But you know what happen? And you know, we – we fall asleep, and after next day we have food, and that lady came, how we feel? She feels so sorry for us, and all this. And after you – we [indecipherable]

Q: This is the first one, the one who left you?

A: No, the second one.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: The second one.

A: Second one, we met her, you know, on – on – on that camp.

Q: Right.

A: And we asking about this lady, where is she, you know? And you know what – what she did? They used to give the few dollars for every child. Like you know? And they give to the lady that money, and after she give it to every child, like two dollars, and that child can, you know, when you in the city, or something, you can buy something, a banana, or – or this or that. And you know, they – they been givings like – you know, some soup, or – you know, some –

Q: Okay.

A: – like that. And you know what she did? She took it that money, and she arrangement everything to **Africa**, and she on transport herself.

Q: So, she took the money that was supposed to go to the children?

A: Go to the children, and – and – and she – you know, arranged sa – her transport with something – somebody else, and she run – wanted to go to –

Q: **Africa**.

A: – **Africa**, to some camp. And – and she didn't want to have nothing to do, you know, with us. And that lady that she says in **Pahlevi** that this girl, she don't want to join the orphanage. That the lady.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And – and after, you know, we stay with this second lady, and with that second lad – and you know what happened? They stopped her, and she was one year in – in the jail, for that what she did. You know, that Polish people did that.

Q: That's right.

A: You know, they punish, you know, that was like, you know, and they punish her. And we join that ti – for good, that orphanage when that second lady, she took us. And there was more ladies over there, because that time was 80 all together, was at least 350 of us.

Q: And what happened with your father and your other sister?

A: They – I didn't know nothing about them, they took them to the hospital, and I didn't know where they are. Only when I came to **Africa**, I know – I find them, you know, that time. And all the journey in **Teheran**, all, I didn't know nothing about them, completely nothing. I didn't know if they're alive, or no, or what.

Because it's not communication like – like you know, like today or what. You – you know how it is. You imagine –

Q: Chaos.

A: – it was 1942 - '43, then you – you think only about that. Go to that years. Is no telephones, no – you know. I didn't know nothing about them, completely nothing.



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

I didn't know if they – you know, what happened to them, because they took them from the boat, straight. I even didn't see them how they took them, you know, from the boat to the hospital, straight to the hospital. And – and you know, and I travel later with – with that – you know –

Q: Orphanage lady, yeah.

A: – lady with that orphanage, yeah. And with that orphanage we went to the [indecipherable] and even as yo – pictures, y-you see. And that lady, he – she was angel. She was – oh my g – I always think about this lady, that she should have the best awards or – or something, what she did to the – you know, these children. Cause these children, you can't imagine how everybody was sick. Every – and there was young – she pick up some children on the dead bodies of mother. You know, two years old, one years old, five years old. And in her orphanage, everybody was so sick, with their eyes, with stomachs, you know, like this. With – they been crying all night. She was walking – oh my God, we been sleeping, you know, like – like sardines too, you know, in that camp, in – you know –

Q: Near **Teheran**.

A: After **Teheran**, we been in – oh, I said that name, and I forgot now. Oh my goodness. You know, before **Mombasa**. Before **Bombay**. I thought I said – mentioned before that name.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

**Q: Parlevy(ph)? Parlevy(ph)?**

**A:** Well – ah, okay, maybe is going come in. And then, you know, over there, she – you know, and from that place we went to **Mombasa**, and from **Mombasa** we went to **Bombay** – what was it? **Bombay** and we went to **Mombasa**, and to **Tengeru**.

And I was all the time in **Tengeru** with my sisters. And then, when I was in **Tengeru**, I find my father. He was in south of **Africa**. And then my sister join us in **Tengeru**.

**Q: What's Tengeru?**

**A: Tengeru, Tanzania.**

**Q: Tanzania, okay.**

**A: Tanzania, that camp was called Tengeru.**

**Q: Okay.**

**A:** And we been in that camp in **Tengeru**, and that whole orphanage was over there. We came, and we have like a little houses. That was like a jungle, and they cleaned that jungle, and they built the small houses from, you know, like dirt, you know. They put the roofs from bananas leaves, and something like that, and was for four people round, and was four people, four beds was, and, you know, nothing on the floor, you know, only cement, and – and but we have, you know, something. Doesn't matter, we have, you know, hard time on beginning in **Africa**, because you

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

know, with insects, with – with you know, snakes, with this, with that. But – and later was really beautiful, was – everything was clean. They been so good to us, they opened the schools, they opened this boys – Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, they make enquire, they – that lady in orphanage, you can't find another lady how she was to that children. She was so nice, so –

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: **Gr-Groszetcka(ph), Eugenia(ph) Groszetcka(ph).**

Q: **Eugenia(ph) Groszetcka(ph).**

A: Oh, I wanted that name, city, and I thought I am – I have, but not. **Eugenia(ph) Groszetcka(ph)**, she die – you know, you imagine that she went to – to **England**, and she was older lady, she was maybe that time 72, 73. Not older, but that time it was older. And she, in **England**, adopted seven children. After that orphanage, and in orphanage she has 800 children, over 800 children she has in orphanage. But you should see how she was good to these children, how she teach us, you know, good, you know, example. She was a very good example for us. And – and I have really, you know, we have a good time. Was not easy, because wa – I was very sick on malaria. I was sick all the time. I nearly die on malaria in **Africa**. Only times got one doctor. He came that he was a – you know, trained like a tripi – a ti – tri – typical – trip – **tripical(ph)** sickness.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Tropical sickness – sickness, yeah.

A: Tropical sick – sickness, yeah. And he came to ours camp, and that time I have a big, you know, over here, I still have, you know, cut. And I was – it was infected, and all this, and I went with – with this to him, and he noticed that I am very sick on malaria, and he cure me. And after a year, I get much better, and he notice me, because he goes from one camp to another, we have 17 camps in **Africa**, and after a year he came again to ours camp, and he was ca – going on the horse, and I was walking near the orphanage, and he recognize me, and he said, oh my goodness, you are so beautiful girl. And he said, you know what? He said **dziecko**, you know, like little girl. And he said, you know what? If you didn't came that time to me, you have only two, three weeks life. Because I be dead on malaria. I was – my blood – I was yellow like, more than yellow, you know, and all this, my – my blood be, you know, all, you know, poisoned by the malaria. And he, you know, did that – that I am alive today. I always think about him. And – and after, you know, the – when I cure on malaria, but I wanted to tell you that that teacher – I was so good at school, I don't want to say that really, but I was really, you know, si – pretty, you know, smart, that I didn't have problem, you know, with the school. And I was good, I – I – I tried to with the one priest, you know, make an organization like **solidar**(ph) – **solidarma**(ph), yeah, and all this. And after, when she came, she teach me Polish

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

in my – you know, after that jail, and all this, she came to ours camp, and she was teacher, and she teach English in my class.

Q: You mean from your colony?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: From that orphanage that she stealed that money. That lady that she left us in **Teheran**.

Q: She stole the money – she came and she taught Polish in your class?

A: Yeah, yeah. She – she was in the – one year in jail, and after sh – the – she was free, and they sent her to **Africa**, and she was a teacher, and – and she teach me, you know, in the class, Polish. She was a – she teach Polish.

Q: Was she a good teacher?

A: A-And she – yeah, she was good, but not to me. You should see what I went through with her. You know, she recognize me, she knew me, you know, recognize. She knew what – what we did, and all this, and she didn't want it, you know? And I was so good in Polish. I don't want to say, but sometimes the teacher, you know, in another classes, she read my – my story, or something like that. When she came, I have only, you know – what do you say over here, very good? Five?

Q: F?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: I have three.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, **F** – **F**, or – or – or **D**.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, from – and that – th-th-that teach – the – my friends, they says, **Helena**, what happened to you? And I say [**indecipherable**] I want to go to the higher, you know, to the principal, and I wanted to go to complain to the – but that time, you been so afraid everybody. I was so afraid, maybe I go, they going listen her, not me, and they going say this and that, and I cou – keep quiet, and I have that – that **D**, and – and I have, you know, problem, but – but it's pass and – and you know, and I think okay, you know, what you going to do?

Q: So, where – where did your f – when did your father appear?

A: My father appear, I think 1940 – '45. Forty-five he came from – they join him from South **Africa** to – to us.

Q: And that was you and your two other sisters?

A: Yeah, and that's all. Then, I have my oldest sister, **Any**a(ph), and she was take care of e – of the – in orphanage. She took care of – of the young boys from – from four to eight.

Q: Okay.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: She was the – you know, take care of [indecipherable] of – of them. But after they said that you can join the army, and she was old enough, and she wanted. And she left, and she went to **England**, and she was in air force. And after she finished that, you know, sa – sergeant, you know, my sister, from that army. And thanks to her, that she went to that army, we could go to **England**. Because it's another thing over here, you know, in – in **Africa**. We been in **Africa**, was really nice, we have, you know, sickness, and this and that, but I can't complain because we been free, and we not been hungry. And – and we have – you know. And we been free. You know, yi – nobody knows what to be a free, you know? When we been in **Siberia**, and after, you know, it doesn't matter what condition you are, all this, but y-you are free, then you can always manage to do this and that. But when you in – in place that you can't do nothing, only what they told you, that, you know, big, different story. And you know, and was like this, that when they war is finish, all the time we been thinking, they prepare us at school, that we are going straight to **Poland**.

Q: Well, I want to find out; do you remember what it – where you were when you learned that the war is over?

A: Oh yeah, we – we learn – we – we knew everything in – in – in **Africa**. They always told us every day teachers at school, wha-what kind of news is. That we knew – we knew that, you know, about **Sikorski**, what he did, about the **Yalta**,

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

about **Monte Cassino**, about you know, all these stories like that, and what happened in **Poland**, and – and this and that. We knew, you know, stories that teacher, when they came to classes, that on beginning they says, listen, is this and this is happen. We didn't know completely, but we knew.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, is be – it comes to that they – they – they really was thinking, that they been so nice teachers we have in – you know, at school, and we have in Girl Scouts, and – and you know, really nice, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: We knew that. And we been crying when **Sikorski** die, we been happy when they win on the **Monte Cassino**. And, you know, we been crying and – and – and be happy like – like always, and – and the war, when it was end. But after that, the war and everything, they been – we have to leave **Africa**, because we went only, you know, for during the war. That was a English colony, and – and **England** was responsible for us, they feed us, they clothe us, and everything. And after the war finish, we have to go where is somebody have to go, the camp was closing, you know, that's it. And thanks God we have, this time, sister in the army. And if you – like my husband, he was in the army, and his family was with me, in the – you know. And she was in the army, and we could left that camp, first transport. And



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

was so nice, we been so happy, we came to **England**, and you know, she took us to **Nottingham**. She has big pro – you know, problem because she didn't have much money, they o – she only was left army, and she mar – she was married. She has a baby, that baby die, she was so depress, and all this. And three of us came with nothing, nothing. We have only dress like that, and all – two dresses. No clothes, no nothing. Even in **England**, we couldn't go on the street because we didn't have no dresses, no nothing. And she went right away to the store, she bought us, you know, suits and dresses and shoes.

Q: So where was your father?

A: Oh, my father, sh – he was in **England**.

Q: Earlier.

A: At that time, yeah. But my father, he was already about 68, 69? Sixty-nine he was already. And he was very depress. Oh, after the moth – he was – even in **Africa**, we – we didn't have nothing from him, nothing. He was like – like only hnh, you know, you – you get t – couldn't talk to him. He was like completely dead, you know. He was in **England**, but he went – he was in – he wa – he live with me, on beginning when we, you know, married. And he live little bit with my sister, when I was single. He ca – you know, he came –

Q: Yeah.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: – and after, he wasn't happy, I don't know, and he went to the Polish camp, and right away he die, in that Polish camp. He like feel, you know, was ho – Polish hospital over there. He didn't wanted be over here, he wanted go to a doctor, he di – couldn't speak English, we couldn't speak English. Was very hard. And he said – and he went not too far from us, we visiting him, and all this. But he said, listen **Helen**, you know, you work all day over here. I don't understand any English, I don't have no friends over here, nobody, and I'm going go, at least I am going have hospital that I can speak Polish, and all this. And that's why we took them over there, and – and he die right away. He – he is –

Q: And what – what year was this? What year was this?

A: Fifty-one.

Q: Fifty-one.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did he change after you left your mother? Is this what happened?

A: Oh, my goodness. He – he – he wasn't any more a person. He wasn't no any more person. He was, you know, even in the **Siberia**, he was very depressed, very. And after when his – Mother, and that sister, you know, and it – and you should see what we have with this sister in **Uzbekistan**. She was very sick, we left her in one hospital, and after they took her somewhere else. And you don't remember the

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

names, and you know, because it's **Uzbekistan's** names. And we have so much problem with all this, and one time we – we didn't know where is she – and we want to find her. Then th – my father, he went, and he said **Marisz**(ph), I'm going go, I have to find her. And he went. Four days he didn't came home, but he find her some way in the – in the little kip – **kipytka**(ph), she was sitting on the – on the floor, hungry, dirty and all this, oh my goodness, we – you know, so many things happened between the – this way and that way, and he is – he was so disgusting with her. He wanted from **Africa** go to **Poland**. He want very much go to **Poland**. And he said, **Helen**, we are going to **Poland** and **Poland**. And I – when happened with that communist, I says to the – to him, Daddy, I am going to to the jungle and kill myself, but I am not going under the communists. I – I – I – I told him, I – I give promise for myself that I am not going stop, take my life, or – or I am not going go to the – under communists. And that's why he – you know, he didn't like that, I came to **England**, and language and this and that, and he was very depressed. We didn't have no help from him, nothing. Completely nothing, you know.

Q: So, what – your family left four people in **Russia**, in the **Soviet Union**. Your brother who disappeared, he was supposed to –

A: Army.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: – in the army. Your mother.

A: My sister, three.

Q: And then the sister who married, who was in the **kolkhoz**.

A: Oh yeah, no, this one – this one, she came and she was in **Africa**. And her husband was in the army.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. This one is – yeah, she was – but we three – three are left.

Q: You left three.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And my brother, you know, that we didn't know nothing about him, a-after, when I was in **Africa**, I find him – you know, he find us.

Q: He found you.

A: Yeah, he was looking. He was in **Belgium** that time.

Q: I see. And –

A: He was looking for us, and – and somebod – and no – you know, no – when my sister went to **England**, and she was in air force –

Q: Air force

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: – he met her. He find her in **England**. And she told him where we are, and he wrote the letter to us. This way he find us.

Q: And he was in the air force as well?

A: No. He was in **gen-gendarmerie**, you know, he – police.

Q: He was an a – he was a policeman.

A: Policeman in army, policeman. Different.

Q: He was an army policeman.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: He was a gen-gen – **gendarmerie**.

Q: So, he was in the British army?

A: No, he – he was in Polish army.

Q: Oh.

A: He was in Polish army.

Q: I thought that the Poles worked with the Britains – with – with the British.

A: Yeah, they fight with the British –

Q: British.

A: – no.

Q: No?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: British don't. They – they did – with them, they fight the Germans and the Russians.

Q: That's right, that's right. But I mean, under the British –

A: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: [indecipherable] yeah.

A: Oh yeah, he was under the British, oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. That's what I –

A: [indecipherable] you are right. But he was Polish army, but yeah –

Q: Under the British.

A: – in the same – my husband, he was in Polish army, but he was under – un – English, oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: They all – because the Polish army didn't have nothing, completely we didn't have no money, no nothing. That **England** support us with everything. And [indecipherable] and you know, the **Stalin** want if ger – General **Anders** give him army only, to fight against the **Germany**, but – and it [indecipherable] he wanted starving in – in **Russia**. We'd be all starved, but General **Anders**, he said, if you going to do that, you know, I am not give you army and nothing. And that's why they feed us little bit. And thanks God General **Anders**, he wanted to leave **Russia**.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

And that's why, you know, **Stalin** was mad, and some – in **Poland** they didn't like us, because we are like escape from – from, you know, communists.

Q: I see.

A: And – and they didn't like **Anders** for a long time, only last year they admit, you know, **Anders**, they – they – you know, they make a [indecipherable] **Anders**, and all this. But under the communists, they hated **Anders**, and us, you know, all that, they been thinking, why we didn't came to **Poland**, but –

Q: Yeah.

A: I – h-h-how u-us – few went, and they landed again in **Siberia**, or in jail.

Q: Yeah.

A: My friend went, and – and – and she was in jail for two years, and oh my goodness, what happened to her. That's why, you know, they didn't like us, but we didn't wanted to go.

Q: Yeah.

A: We said no, and that's it, and we stay over here, and that, you know, from **Africa**, I went to **England**, and –

Q: And you met – you met your husband in **England**?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you were – got married?

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

A: He was – his – his family was in the same camp when I was.

Q: Okay.

A: And –

Q: We'll talk with him about his experience.

A: Yeah.

Q: But, when you met in **England**, did you marry soon? How long did you –

A: Pretty – pretty soon.

Q: Okay.

A: We met in June, he was – I came from **Africa**, and he came to see his family, and we met in that camp, because I – I wo –

Q: This is which camp?

A: F – in – in **England**, you know, they have camp for – for these people, which they been coming, you know, for Polish people. They coming from all over.

Q: Yeah.

A: And my sister, she live in **Nottingham**, in the city, and she sent me a check, that I have to, you know, change that check and go and buy tickets on the train and come to **Nottingham**, because I was in **Cornwall**(ph), you know, in –

Q: In **Cornwall**.

A: – south, yeah.



**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: Is that where the camp was?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: South of **England**.

Q: What was the name of the camp? Do you remember?

A: **Cornwall**, no?

Q: No, no, no, **Cornwall's** the place.

A: Yeah, yeah, **Cornwall**, but I don't remember.

Q: You don't remember. Okay.

A: I was only over there one week.

Q: Okay.

A: And that's it.

Q: Okay.

A: And when I got this, and I – he was – came to visit his family, and his friend, they walk to the city, to see that movie. And I went with my sister, younger sister, to buy that ticket, and I go to **Nottingham**. And we been in the bus, and I am standing on the next door, and it stop over here. I don't know if it [**indecipherable**] I didn't have no idea about English cities, or nothing, and – and ye – and – and he didn't speak too much English either. And we didn't know what to do, and he was

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

standing back of me, because you know, they wanted go too, and he knew what position I am. And he said, ah, excuse me, if I can help you. And I says oh, of course. And I told him that I have check and I have to go buy the ticket and **tada** and **tada**. And he said oh, okay, don't worry, I am going – we going help you. And I was so happy, oh my goodness. And that's what happen, we left and we went to the train, to the bank, to the train, we bought the tickets and we went to the movie, because you know, we couldn't get back. And we went to the movie, I feel so, you know, because you know, we been grow in a orphanage, nine o'clock we have to be in bed, and –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and no any boys, or nothing. And I always feel like – like, you know. And then, you know, he said – and you know, are all set, and we came and I says, thank you and bye-bye and that's it, and I then I thought, oh, I am not going see him any more, and all this. But th-th – another sister, she saw us, and she says, oh **Helen**, you know, maybe he's going go with you, maybe, you know. I says, don't even say, you know, because w-we – I have worried about how we can get to **Nottingham**, not, you know, about bo-boyfriends. And after two days, I am going – because we have a – a – a washing – you know, the one room for all camp, you know, that you go to, you know, wash yourself and all this. And I'm going, and

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

next yay I – next day I supposed to leave. And he’s walking after me, and after he said, you know, good morning, good morning, this and that. And he said, you know, I am shorting my vacation and I’m going go to **London** with you, and I’m going, you know. And I was again – because in **London** I thought, how I can get from one train to another, and this and that? And that’s what happen, and when we going to that – on the train, I give him my address, and we start writing. And from ju – June to September, and September he was – left the army, and in December we married. And now is going to be, December, 65 years.

Q: Congratulations. Congratulations. That’s – that’s quite a while.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And you know, and yeah, and we married quick, you know, there is – we been going – and he stayed my city, he rented the – you know, apartment. And in December we married, and we stay with my sister, and after they help me buy the little house, and – and that was that.

Q: How long did you live in **England**?

A: Twelve years.

Q: That’s quite a while.

A: Yeah.

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

Q: So you arrived when? You arrived which year?

A: Forty-eight, and we left '59.

Q: Uh-huh. And then you came here to the **United States**.

A: Yeah, that's a – 12, yeah. No, 11.

Q: Okay. Well, I think we've come close to the end of the interview. I'd like to ask you, from all of those things that you went through, that you experienced, what would you want people to know and understand about all that? What would you want them to try and fathom?

A: You know what I want to understand people, that some people, they says, oh, I was in **Germany**, I was in **Poland** in camps, I was over here, over there. And what is that? I wanted to understand them that **Siber(ph)** is not like **Europe**, or – or **Germany**, or **Poland**, or all this. That place is like – is only if you say **Siberia**, scares you, because from the **Siber(ph)**, nearly nobody goes alive. This is like –

Q: **Siberia**.

A: – like – **Siberia** – this is like a death camp for us, only that happened, that we today, I can talk to you, thanks to the Germans, that they went against the **Russia**. If not happen with that war, then we be long time dead on **Siberia**. And some people they don't think how – what is life in **Siberia**? It's life that you don't have noth – you were like a – the same like they close you in the closet, and only they

**Interview with Helena Knapczyk**  
**May 10, 2013**

give you once – one a day, you know, drink or something. And you don't see nothing else, nothing. You don't know nothing, not what happened in the world. You don't know nothing even few miles, like with us, they told us –

**Conclusion of Interview**