

If you don't mind, I'm going to ask you the day when you were born.

Yes, sure.

I have many questions here, but sometimes I ask one question, and all the questions are answered.

Oh.

Now, I have--

One questions, include all answers.

My name is Dr. Sidney Langer, and I'm the director of the Oral History Project of the Holocaust Studies Resource Center at Kean College of New Jersey. I'm very pleased that Mrs. Gitla Grynwald, who presently resides in Newark, New Jersey, has come today to the college to talk to me about some of her insights during the years of the Holocaust. Mrs. Grynwald, I want to thank you very much for coming on.

Welcome.

Could you tell me a little bit about when you were born, the date that you were born, the town that you were born in, and a little bit about your family?

I was born in Zawiercie. It was the German call after this Wartenau because Freethinker reveal but this name to each city. I was born by parents, the name Mordecai and Mindel Namon.

Mordecai and Mindel Namon?

Namon, yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

What year was that?

What?

What year were you born?

Oh, I was born in 1902.

Month? Date?

October 23.

October 23, 1902.

How do you spell the name of the town?

Zawiercie. Wartenau by the German. But this Zawiercie because there is Freethinker reader with the name Warta. They meet from Zawiercie because his brother there.

How many members were there in your family?

My family were before parents had a mother. And after this it was three girls and three brothers. But in 1917, died one

sister, which was younger from me on five years. So left three brothers and two sisters.

What did your father and your mother do in the town?

My father, my mother was providing a business manufacture for clothes manufacture. In the not ready-- clothes on manufacture--

The material.

--for you to make cloth. It was the upkeep it from there from the factory. What was producing in Zawiercie manufacture. And also, he was providing for much better manufacture, too. He had big business.

Was this a very large town that you lived in?

It was mostly not huge because this was a lot of factories Churscicki, the glass fabric Reich and many others. A lot of factories-- it was only workers. Workers was a lot there. In the 81 factory from which my father was talking to manufacture, was working 7,000 men--

Your father--

--this time.

Do you know what the total population of the town was?

The total population was to 32,000, 33,000.

And what percentage of the 32,000 were Jews?

Maybe 15.

15%.

Yes.

So most of the people who worked in the factories lived in the town.

Yes, there was no Jews. Only some professionals were Jews. The packers in the magazines is such people.

And how far was your town from Krakow?

Krakow was another section. We were near to Katowice, so Oberschlesien. The city, Zawiercie, was between CzÄ™stochowa and Sosnowiec or Katowice.

In Krakow was another line. This was a part of Poland more to the south like called this time Galicia. And this was in Krakow.

Was your family--

Krakow was very big city. It a lot of colleges, universities, museums. There is remarkable structure and also the big temple from the [? Paul. ?]

Did you go to visit Krakow a lot?

What?

Did you go to visit Krakow a lot--

No--

--when you were growing up?

--I was leaving--

But you--

--after my wedding.

Oh, after your wedding. No, but before--

No.

--when you were growing up.

I was because I was in university also.

Before university, where did you go to school?

I went to the Gymnasium-- this was called it. I went to from one to the other, a little higher. This was one seminar from two year. And after this, I went to the other from four years. There, I graduate and went to university.

But unfortunately, I must after a year interrupt my studies, my plans for the future because my mother become sick, and I was the oldest daughter.

What year did you go to the university?

What? I teach.

What year did you go to the university?

Yeah, this was in 1918.

In 1918.

Yes.

And your mother became sick?

Yes.

One year later.

This was in 1919.

1919.

To the end.

Did you have any religious education before you went to the university?

Yes. Somebody come into our house and teach me how to make the prayers and how to teach. And I read a very nice Jewish newspaper, books, and [? jafar. ?]

When you were growing up, before you went to the university, how was the relationship between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish community in the town where you lived?

So the people that thought we are leaving, [INAUDIBLE], it was in our house Jewish peoples first-- not Jewish people, but this was mostly people educated more. And they were cultured. They provide a life-- cultural life. Maybe they're really against the Jews, but they don't show this. The behavior was possible and even sometimes friendly, too.

You said your mother became ill in 1919. And you had to go back to the town.

Because I was the oldest daughter. These was small children. And my father was busy with the business. Besides, this was a maid in-house, but you cannot ever think to call a maid to provide the house.

What did you do between 1919 and 1925?

1924. Yes. My mother was in bad for [INAUDIBLE] sometimes during the time. And she was a little better. We still somebody to help her in the house. And I go back to the university because it was too far a distance [INAUDIBLE] to go and help.

And I went to Krakow to academy where I learned bookkeeping, and stenography. So I become the education. I come home, and I become a post. I was busy. Maybe a year or two after this, they proposed me in the city to take over the library.

And I was a librarian there. And I choose the books. I go out BÄ™dzin, to Sosnowiec, to CzÄ™stochowa some time to file to the state from the catalogs which books I thought are good for this population and for the [? Bickble ?] library. And I provided them 30 years.

So you worked in the library until what year?

Till 1932.

Till 1932. Do you remember any changes that took place in your town when Hitler came to power in Germany?

This time when Hitler come to power, I was in Krakow. I was living in Krakow.

Oh, in 1933.

No, it was no change. It was no change.

Well, when did you first notice any changes in the town? You were in Krakow for what years? Now, you went back to the university. You were in university you said until 1930.

You were working in the library until 1932. And then after 1932?

I was at home.

Still at home.

And I have some bookkeeping for films. This is the way it is going. But people that they have an oil factory. Bankers is the name, Bankers. I provide for the bookkeeping. This was my job. In between, I have to give birth at home, too.

What were your first memories about-- when did you hear about Hitler coming to power in Germany?

We read newspaper every day. '33, But this time was still in the book in between the Jews. I don't know. This time, I come to my conviction that the Jews have a vision but started to voice because of each of his intentions, the [? falsy ?] for what they have for him. Nothing to do, but the Jews in Poland try very hard to come out with the living.

Because of this, they maybe don't pay so much attention to every aspect, with the Jews in Germany because they're very close. Important lift a big amount from people from Schlesien, these Germans, really, but Catholics.

But the end of day we feel some movement, some, but we have no sources to find out about what, about who. So that's the case.

What about Polish Jews who are living in Germany who came back to Poland between 1933 and 1939?

There wasn't such Jews in our city.

There are no Jews who came from Germany to--

Jew?

Jews who came from Germany?

Jews come--

Came originally from Poland--

Yes.

--who were living in Germany and came back to--

No.

--Poland.

They come back only maybe about '36, '37, not before. They come back. Some those very, very sensitive of them with what is going there. They just disappear in time. A lot stood there and wait till they--

Till they drowned. But there are changes in the laws before 1939, were there not?

No, no.

There was no changes?

Yes, no.

Not at all.

No. But I think I hear after this I was very often these people, the biggest cities that they've contacted Jews at German films. They smell something. This is going [INAUDIBLE]. They're very rich. Disappear from the Jews. And they took what they valuable that they could. And this is everything.

Do you remember when the Nazis invaded your town?

Sure.

Do you remember the date?

In Krakow when I was.

The date. Do you remember the date?

The date? This was the 6th of October.

1939.

Yes.

In 1939, you were 37 years old.

Yeah.

What happened? Can you describe what happened when they came into the town?

We have [CROSS TALK]--

Did you have any warning that they were going to come into the town?

No, but you look-- the wall break out. We expect them. But we have no narrow imagination such [? hopes ?] that this can happen for them because you know the Germans are Kultur [NON-ENGLISH] nation. How can they do such deeds? Now our imagination coming at such a picture.

Could you believe this is a war that was being fought, or--

Yes. But I remember--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--that when I was about 16 years, this was a war between the Russian and German, before. This it is finished very, fast. The German come to our city. They went further to the Ost to the Russian side. But nothing can happened. They were friendly, cultural behavior, very nice. How will you can imagine this from such people can something so subtle change?

How many members of your family were still alive at this time--

Now?

--no, in 1939.

Five.

The mother. The father died in '34, '35 January right away.

And as you said, one of your sisters had passed away--

Yeah.

--earlier.

In 1916, she passed away. No, '21-- she has 16 years. I mixed up.

What was the first thing that happened when the Nazis came into your town?

When the Nazis came in our town, this time we were in our apartment. My husband Steve was providing the factory. This was not far.

You were already married.

Sure.

When did you get married?

I get married the half year before.

Half year before, so do you remember the date?

Sure.

Anniversary-- what was the date of your marriage?

I married-- this was in 1933 March 8.

March 8, 1933 you got married.

This exactly that.

So you were together with your husband.

Right away, we rented an apartment, and I lived in Krakow. The Germans come into Krakow?

In September.

And September 19--

6.

September 6, 1939. You were in your apartment at the time?

Nien. No because we ran away before.

Where did you go? All Jews was running, even the Poles, too, he was running, too. And I left an apartment. equipped new things, new furniture, and everything. And we run small city from Krakow back to Poland, Debe, because there was leaving a family of three was taken from our factory. Clothes they have stole from various things like slips, other things, everything for the agriculture.

A non-Jewish family?

A Jewish family.

A Jewish family.

A Jewish family. In [PLACE NAME], we have such knowing people that we went away. And my husband went with me. But then the city where you stood by the people that we know was suddenly a rush, and all mens run away, even my husband, too.

Run away further, further to Poland in the direction of Lwow. In this time, I left alone.

What did your husband say when he left?

He said to me, "All mens must go." He said, "You ask me what I have to do so you go, too. I cannot risk your life in any case."

And he went, and after a few days, the German coming. It was repressions, was beating a lot of things. But he start to go back to our place where come to Krakow. We was-- and I had a necessaire, and this is such small bag. It feels very nice. We have good things.

In there I have a little clothes. I go [? and I take ?] then back, and I come out of a place that has a lot of German sitting. We were sitting a little further.

Come to me, a German, and said, "What do you have here? I have to open this case." I opened it, and he said, "Cloth." He said, "Very well, we have some nice case." Tough question. I said, "I am a simple people." Only to say a boat and still buy us some caraco nice things she said to me this case, you have to be sure that you are somebody you see this moment come to us with such you must be an older man. And he said to him, what do you want from her? She's going with the old people's running. And he listened to him. He let me free. I don't know what this was. After this I don't the man.

Mhm.

I come home, by a bit early, my husband was not with me. I'm alone. But the apartment was not touched. Everything OK. I have-- beside me, was living a Christian woman, with the men, and she was right away by me, and told me never-- nothing has happened here, mean while you were absent.

And we started to stay in the apartment. I was very desperate because my husband, I had no sign from him. Nothing. And this was in the, maybe two, three days later, a bombardment in Krakow. They put down on Krakow bombs. Nothing to do. You have to stay and to wait til you would be killed or not killed.

And a few days later, knock somebody on the door. And I ask, who is it? He said, Aron. My husband come back. And I opened the door. I was very glad that I see him. And I said, what's happened to you? How you come back? He said, they went to a place Kolbushev.

Kolbuszowa.

Yes. And there the German catch them. They cannot go further. They decide to go back. And so this way he come back. Luckily he goes through the way without happening. And OK.

What happened next?

Then we-- was in a lot of military in Krakow. Come right away a governor and this was a Jewish community to organize. They have to deliver the German what they demand.

A Judenrat.

Yes. What they demand. And every day, hundreds and thousands of Jews to work.

Now were you already in the ghetto at this time?

No. No.

OK. So Judenrat was set up in the town.

In the same apartment where I live.

OK. In the same apartment.

Yeah.

The Judenrat, the Jewish Council, was already established.

Yes.

And the Germans would tell them that we wanted a certain number of people to come and work.

In the Jewish establishment has made us all police.

Mhm.

Judenrat. In the Judenrat is police and a commander, also a Jew, and they must do what they want. What they want from them. What they demand. They-- there is too much to tell about everything did. Every day, and every occasion. OK. I leave this to the history, but I tell you the important.

They set a goal that they have the amount, every day, so much people to work. And another thing, they delivered them in very bad circumstances because they were beating, very tortured and sometimes killed somebody. So was this going on til 19-- this was 40 already.

My husband, we live not far from the factory, still was going out and the people, the Arya, was coming in, and they work. And he had no demands for nobody to give up [? death-- ?] for something else. Don't needs to. In the factory, what delivered us, the raw material for the screens, everything, they function it, when I made an order, they delivered.

In a certain time, come to us a man. He said, he's sent from the government to take over the factory. OK. You can not disagree. I must agree. He come in our apartment, he look the books, what I provide. After this he said, you can do full day work. I come from time to time for control. Your husband can stay in [work because they have no another such worker like he was.

He was educated in his trade in Germany, in France. OK, but this occasion, this was a nice man, was from Vienna. He was Madritsch. Not Madritsch. [? Etel. ?] Madritsch was my factory after this. [? Etel. ?] And he-- suddenly, we come over, as the Jews have to wear the white lents on the-- as a sign to recognize them all over. They are not allowed to move without them.

My husband does have to take up on the Gestapo. This was on the big rynek from Krakow, rynek glowny, this is the main rynek. And come, they come from there with their car. And took him in the car. I was very worried.

When they come to the Gestapo, he left me inside. He went out. In a few minutes, he opened the door and he said to him, run on the other side. He ran over trotuar. And there he took over him and went with him to the Gestapo.

And there he become permission to work. They give him a lent. And so he stood in a factory further.

And after this, we stood till '41. '41 was the month-- which month? March, I think. Was built a ghetto. I must leave my apartment. Before I closed my door where I live, lived another man, a Christian.

And suddenly, one day, the door opens and a German come out. And he said, open the door to me. And I opened the door. And they come in. They choose everything what they like to choose. Was a lot to choose, where everything was new-- clothes, underwear, bed wear, table clothes, even kitchen things. And they took the furniture too. OK. I still think

when I have life, there's nothing lost.

After this, occurred, this what we go to the ghetto. And you need nothing. There, we lived-- by us, when they have emptied the apartment, after they took out the furniture, I took to me a German couple that come running from Germany. They have nowhere to be-- they live with us one room without furniture and me in the other, in the kitchen.

In the ghetto?

In the ghetto. No, this was before the ghetto. When the ghetto was builded, I went with them to ghetto. We two pairs went. And he-- in this time, he was working as a gardener for the Gestapo. And they give him a nice apartment, a kitchen and a room.

And he said to me, the [PERSONAL NAME], Ms. Grynwald, take what you want, other room or the kitchen. I said, no, I take kitchen. You take the room. So we sit together. And in the ghetto, we were sitting-- he was sitting in a house-- located in a house that was protected a little because he was working on the Gestapo.

And so we stood there. This is '43-- '44-- no '43 till-- till they moved us. In '43, this was in March also, I think. to Plaszow, yeah?

In March of 1943, they moved you to Plaszow.

To Plaszow, yes. This was a concentration camp.

Did you know what was going on in other areas of Poland--

Not much--

--while you were in the ghetto?

Not much. When I look out from the windows onto the street sometimes I only was seeing people running, and the German after them and shooting. You know? Without question, for nothing. And the throwed people to the earth and killed them. Many things. Because I cannot go out this time to see. When I go out, I have the same end as the other.

You were in the ghetto, you were living for approximately three years.

In the ghetto we were-- no, not three years. From '41, '41 till '43, two years.

Two years. You never went outside of the ghetto for those two years?

One time. I was risk and went with such work men, persons coming to the city with food, with potatoes. And I went to him because I was looking like not a Jew.

On the-- on the wagon I went to my cousin to Pilica. And from there, I risk my life and I go with somebody that provide me to the road, the forest, to Zawiercie to see my ma. What can I say, it was very hard.

I was slying, slying in the forest in the night until we come through. And a young Polish boy saw me when I stopped by some men for a drink water. And went to the post and said to them that I am a Jew.

When I come to the other side, the side from the Zawiercie, a little bit of [INAUDIBLE], they keep me.

Where you used to work?

What?

The place where you used to work?

No. They want see everything what I had in the clothes. And I have in the clothes a piece of gold money. And I was convinced when they find this, they shoot me right away.

In this moment, in this moment that they looked in my-- this was in the coat. And my coat come-- [NON-ENGLISH] in wagon. And they was looking there something. And because of this, they let me out. But not to go farther, but to go back to Pilica.

And I start to go back to Pilica. And I went to Pilica back. I come back to Pilica. And this time my brother and mother sent a woman, a Polish girl for me. She took me over. Until I come and saw my mother, and my sister, and my brothers.

And back, I go another way, also with the [INAUDIBLE]. Not the official, on the side, and I come back to Myszkow. And after this, back, on the way to Pilica from where I come. And from there, I go to Krakow, also by furgons. Not by train. There was no train in this place.

And then you went to Plaszow in-- in March 19--

'43.

'43.

Yes.

With your husband?

Yes, sure.

Did everybody from the ghetto go to Plaszow then?

Yeah, everyone. But my husband has a passport to go to work every day. This was--

What happened when you came into Plaszow?

To Plaszow? They moved us in big barracks. To Plaszow you can take only, personally, a few things, not much. And even a small bag, some food for you for the day. And we come to Plaszow, it as big barracks, one by the other.

And on the barracks was bleachers, one down, one higher, more higher, three grades. And everyone become a place, one by the other to sleep. For men, separate. For women, separate.

Separate buildings.

Yes.

Separate side too. This was divided by a wire. And this was Plaszow. And there started the prosecutions again and again in bigger amount. And terrible-- terrible restrictions.

How did you get to Plaszow?

How I get?

To Plaszow?

From Krakow?

Yeah.

This is not far.

I understand, but you were-- the Germans, did they transport you to Plaszow?

I told you, I was walking, walking.

How far was it? How long did it take you to walk there?

This took maybe a half hour, maybe three quarter of hours. For some people an hour, because it was different. And the escort, on this side, right to shoot.

When you-- so in other words, when you came into Plaszow there was a selection?

In Plaszow, no.

Well, you said the right to shoot.

When you going out, when you stood in the morning to work.

Right.

Not in order like they want.

Right.

They called them out and shoot.

What did you do in Plaszow, you, yourself?

I was-- in ghetto I established by Madritsch, a firm from clothing for the military. I give a sewing machine. And they took me to work to sew. And there, Madritsch, the same firm, also installed such factory in ghetto. And this way I come to work again under Madritsch in ghetto and then in Plaszow.

And when I worked there, I tried very hard because the norm was to pay two pens daily in the military. But I may three and I received a piece of bread. Was I very glad because I can accomplish something for my husband. You see?

And there was going on life, everything, with everything, with killing, with hanging, with the appells. They suddenly in the night and day, they call us out together. They have to hang somebody. You have to look.

Why do they hang somebody?

Why? For nothing. Imagination. From their abnormality, their inhumanity. I don't know from where in German so much-- so much brutal, terrible people.

Did you see your husband while you were in Plaszow?

When I was in Plaszow, he was separated.

Did you have any contact?

I risked-- yes. I risked-- I go to there. And he come out. We stood a little farther and I see him. And I put under the gate

something. Then I go back. He took this and have to eat. So that's life.

How long were you in Plaszow?

In Plaszow I was from 1943-- March, till November '44.

What happened in November 1944?

1944, they liquidated Plaszow. And we were the last name. We went-- they send us with a train to Auschwitz.

When you say we, do you mean you and your husband?

No. Only the women, we women.

Only the women?

Yes. My husband was sent in September 8th.

OK, you were sent to Auschwitz November 1944.

Yes.

How were you transported to Auschwitz?

To Auschwitz, by train.

Did you know where you were going?

No, packed not to breathe even. People fainted. And some of them finished their life in this case.

What happened when you came to Auschwitz?

When we came to Auschwitz, this was in the night. This was electricity in the way. The train stood. And suddenly order to go out. We went out. Was a [NON-ENGLISH] from such big Germans, the SS.

We stood. After this, took a little time. They give an order to march and we went in this direction what they show up. We went. When we come closer to some place-- this was dark, I cannot tell you what this was-- and we saw a [NON-ENGLISH] woman, tall, nice dress, and such robes. Not in dresses, no, robes. They was waiting for us.

In every part we come, ordered to go in this place, and this place, and this place. So we did come in. This was like I told you, such as a bleacher, and a place for one and one human being. And you have to lie down. And everything what we insist before. By the gate, we everything put down, everything.

And so we came in. Even before they changed by us the clothes, they give their clothes. Nothing personal from the other people what they took. What was good, they took for them.

And after the night, we didn't receive any food, any drink, nothing. In the morning, an appell. We all run out and stood in the lines to take the orders again. They come out and give us-- and give us some advice, which part have to go this way, this part in this way.

And then we come in there. Was kastrulls with black coffee like. And this, they said, they give us a bowl to take this coffee to drink. Who can? But after this, people used to drink from them too. No choice.

In the first few days was still movement, here and back, here and back. After a few times, the Madritsch restart. He

called his people. I was between. Because I was walking by him.

And I went. So in the morning when I stood up, and I go to wash-- was a laundry. Was a big barrack and comes with the bowls. There you can wash you, one by the other. And so, give us-- do our part, what you can to clean yourself. And after this, we went to the-- I went to Madritsch.

The other people-- this was other one-- manufacture to the Gross. I cannot remember. And the others went to work. And the other people, they made organize such [NON-ENGLISH] comings. And the people went to work.

In day we have nothing to eat. We was working 12 hours. 12 hours without interruption. After 12 hours, we was left free to go home. Again, to stood the order and go into a escort home, not separate like you want. Only everything in order. Just everything to make people unable to leave, unable to leave.

Did people try to escape?

No. I have not the courage, first. And I know my husband is also there. And I escape, he's going to be punished.

Other people tried to escape?

Not women, men. This was a terrible result for them. For every man, they took 50 and shoot them. As I was going on this life, going on, one time in the night, they called an appell. And they sent a transport to stone break-- stone break. 600 people somebody. They send away.

And there still was some surprises, which made this life terrible. No to take, envy. I don't-- till today, I cannot imagine how we still are living in human minds that they're all not crazy from what was going there.

This was '43, '44. '44, they sent me to Auschwitz. And I stood with the group, what they send with me, eight or 10 days. Because there's no decision from Hitler what to do with us, at last come an order to send us to Bergen-Belsen. In Bergen-Belsen we was unloaded.

How long were you in Auschwitz before you went to Bergen-Belsen?

Auschwitz, how long?

Before you went to Bergen-Belsen.

Three weeks. This was Birkenau, not Auschwitz.

I'm sorry?

This was the camp by Auschwitz.

In Birkenau.

Yeah, we all arrived to Birkenau.

To Birkenau first.

And after this, they divide.

So you went to Bergen-Belsen.

Yeah.

Only the woman were transported with you to Bergen-Belsen.

Yes.

Again, in transport cars.

Sure.

Do you know how long it took to get to Bergen-Belsen?

I think six days.

Six days.

Some transport is going four days, it depends.

Did you have any food for the six days?

No, who food? Who need to eat? They won't have dead people. The whole prosecution was to give them result dead people, killed people.

How were you able to survive for so many days?

I don't know. You know, when I--

I don't just mean how are were you able to survive without food, but I mean--

With my mind?

With your mind.

Listen, my mind today is deteriorated. I have a brilliant mind.

You do have a brilliant mind.

I had a brilliant mind. Not like this. Sometimes I must stop. I cannot talk further. This come out from time, what I need to.

Are these lights bothering you? Is it too hot?

What?

Is it too hot?

A little hot, but I think this will not take so long more.

Because if you want to take a break for a few minutes, that's--

No, I want finish.

OK. What happened when you came to Bergen-Belsen?

When I came to Bergen-Belsen, we came also in such barrack, but bleachers, one, two, three. And this was no food. They cook soup from greens, from greens.

Would you like something to-- I'm sorry.

What?

Do you want something to drink?

No. No, I won't drink.

You what? Do you want a little juice?

No. My husband is there?

Yes.

I don't see him.

Yeah, he's there. He wants to know if you want some juice.

Yes. Do you want to take some juice?

I don't need.

Yeah, is it OK?

I have enough. I have enough. I knew--

So that's-- we're out of tape now. It's an hour. You got to change tape or take a break, whatever you want to do.

OK. You're not using two-hour tapes?

There's only-- [INAUDIBLE] two-hour tape.

No. Yeah.

Not-- yeah, [INAUDIBLE] not three quarter.

Not three quarter, really?

You want to throw another tape in? Or do you want to stop?

Yeah, I want to throw in a tape. We'll take a two-minute break. He has to change the--