

We now continue with part two of our interview with Jola Hoffman. Jola, I wanted to get back to the time that you were in the Warsaw ghetto. And I wanted to know if, as a child, you had any sort of normalcy. Did you have any childhood girlfriends or just things of personal interest that a young child would be doing not during the time of strife?

Well, it's an interesting question actually, because if you can track my story-- and I'm thinking about it now myself as you ask this question-- I started school. First of all, I was born in Germany, so I must have had a few friends in Germany. While I was going to one school there briefly, I had some friends. Then I went to a different school, the Jewish school from '36 to '38, so I must have had some friends there.

Then I had to leave them. And then I went to Poland. And I was there one year in school. I must have made a few friends there. And then I lost touch with these friends. I did not see them again in all these places.

And then I was in Lwów for two years. And I did have some friends in Lwów. As a matter of fact, one of my little friends turns out to be-- you won't believe it-- Jerzy Urban. And Jerzy Urban is the one who is the spokesman for the Polish government now.

And it was funny because Jerzy Urban, at one point, was in hiding too, in Warsaw, the same time I was. And the story was that he actually told either a kid or another person in Warsaw while he was with them that he actually had a different name a while ago. So they were all scared that he's going to be given away. And obviously he wasn't, because he's pretty much alive and kicking.

He's the one who is now speaking for the Polish government. There seem to be a few Jews in the Polish government we may not even think about. Jerzy Urban is one of them.

And in the Warsaw ghetto, there I do remember falling in love with a young fellow who must have been a year or two older than I was. His name was Shmulik. And his grandfather was a judge before the war. And I had a crush on him. And after the war I was very anxious to find him, but I didn't. [? It's sad, but ?] he was gone.

And I also remember, in the Warsaw ghetto, meeting a girl I went to school with in Leipzig, in the Jewish school. She was a Czech girl. I remember her coming into the Warsaw ghetto. I saw a group of Czech Jews being-- I happened to have been in that neighborhood, I guess, when they were brought into the ghetto from Prague, and she was one of them. And I saw her briefly, but then we lost touch.

So actually, all through my growing years, and even after the war, I made friendships which had to stop and were broken, broken to such an extent that, except now for the friends that I have in London, other friends, I don't know what happened to them. And I miss that.

I miss that, because I hear my mother saying she still has a few friends who also survived the war, or were in America or left Europe. And she says, oh, I sat with this one, and through high school I knew her when I was five years old and that's how I learned my French. Because this friend of hers had a French governess, and that's how my mother started speaking French. And she still lives in Poland. And my mother corresponds with her.

And I have a twinge that I just never had this kind of a relationship. And maybe it continues to some degree. I don't feel that link that I have with friends, that you have when you have someone that you've known for many years. That was a very good question, because that's a void which is there.

You get a sense of impermanence. Is that what you're saying?

No, I don't have the sense of impermanence, but as far as relationships are concerned with friends.

Yeah.

Yes.

In terms of relationships.

Yes, and I don't feel the closeness now. I thought I had it, but I really don't feel it, this depth you may have when you had the continuity, at least, in the same area. I just don't have it.

Were there any other particular memories you had of the ghetto that you would like to share with us?

The ghetto?

Yes, before we move on.

I was thinking about this, too. It would have been different. I think my memory would have been much sharper if I had been thinking about it after the war, talking about it sooner, and made notes about it sooner. Because I was there eight months, and I know it had a deep effect on me. But somehow I worked it the other way. I was trying to forget about it. And I was quite successful in suppressing a lot of it.

For instance, I had a very negative attitude about a lot of things in the ghetto. When I saw the Jewish policemen, I couldn't understand how a Jew could be a policeman. And I hated to see it. I had, I'd say, a very negative attitude about that. Also, some of us were in businesses and were actually making money. And I couldn't understand that either. Of course, now, when I'm older and I look back, I say, well, you know you do it because you hope not only that you survive, but you're helping your family to survive. And there are many things that go into it.

The same thing with the Jewish council, the ghetto. I couldn't understand how they could have. How could any one of us be on council and work, actually? I thought they were working with the Germans. Well, I'm sure there were members of the council who felt that they were helping their own people by doing what they were doing. And I'm sure some of them committed suicide and died prematurely, even sooner than the Germans would have taken their lives.

One act, I do recall being told-- I didn't see it with my own eyes-- was Janusz Korczak. He was a pediatrician. It's a well-known story. But I remember reading his books. I used to love his books because they were about children who are running the orphanage. And he had lived in the orphanage and running the orphanage, because Janusz Korczak, who started off as a pediatrician-- he was a physician from a very assimilated home, just like mine was, maybe even more than mine was. And then decided to open up an orphanage.

He had a Jewish orphanage. He also had a non-Jewish orphanage. He had two orphanages. And he wrote books about it. And he wrote children's books about it. The characters were great, and they ran-- he had a government, which was unheard of in those days. He had a school government, school council. And they actually made policies.

Now, in the '20s and '30s, it was a very authoritarian education. Certainly the students had nothing to say about it. And he did not believe in it. And so he had his own council. Also, I do remember my family members in Warsaw taking clothes to the orphanage on a regular basis. It was quite a thing to do, to help with the kids there, anybody who could do that.

In 1937 or '38, Janusz Korczak went to Palestine with his nurse. And he was asked to stay in Palestine to work on one of the kibbutzim. And he was ready to make the change because it became too difficult for him to work in Warsaw, and he was ready to make this change. And he only came back to Warsaw to train someone to run his orphanages. And this is when he was caught.

And one of the orphanages was in the ghetto, actually, in the small ghetto. And he stayed there. And the last year of his life were very, very difficult, because he had to go around and ask people for money all the time because there was no food available for the children. It was awful. And he was a sick man.

And then, when the Germans started liquidation, one of the first things they liquidated was the orphanage. And there are stories now that Janusz Korczak went with his children to Umschlagplatz. Even so, the

Germans didn't want him to go. The Germans wanted to release him and his nurse because they didn't want any heroes to remain. And they knew that he would become a hero. And they did ask him to leave, and he said he would not leave his children. So he went to the death with the children, making them feel comfortable that they were just going on a picnic, an outdoor day in the country. And there comes back to me what I said, it's so important to have a loving human being next to you. It makes a big difference.

Where we were in Poland, seven years ago with Eli, my husband, and another friend, the Harvats-- Eddie Harvat, a friend of ours also is Polish, like I am-- we visited an artist in Zakopane. His name is [Personal name] Henrik [Personal name] And he had this marvelous wooden carving, sculpture, tall one of Janusz Korczak. Absolutely beautiful. Life-size. And he had two young children. Janusz Korczak has an arm around two young children. And it's a marvelous piece of art.

And I asked him, would be wonderful if you donated this piece to Yad Vashem, to Israel, because they do have a special room in the museum for Janusz Korczak. And Mr. [Personal name] said he did not realize that he was Jewish, Janusz Korczak, that he's considered a national Polish hero, and not a Jewish hero, which is quite interesting. So he was surprised when we told them the story of Janusz Korczak.

So not only do we say he's a Jewish hero, but apparently the Poles adopted him as their own hero as well. I don't know how he found himself in the ghetto, how they explained that. Maybe they just don't even mention that he was in the ghetto. But it was an interesting follow-up to the story of Janusz Korczak, to hear now that he's considered a Polish hero.

I'd like to go back, by the way, to the Polish trip that we took seven years ago because it was very interesting, because I did go back. I do remember that story from the Warsaw ghetto. I was told, and I do remember that part.

Also, when I left the ghetto that morning, my mother couldn't get back to the apartment anymore where we were staying, to the room, because there was a blockade. And everyone was taken that morning at 9 o'clock. My grandparents, my grandmother-- my father's mother, my mother's mother, not her father, and a number of other relatives who lived in the same apartment house. So had I stayed, had I not left that morning, a half hour later would have been too late. Would have been gone.

How was your health during the time that you were in the ghetto?

It must have been quite good, because the only thing that hit me was the flu, the grippe. But on the whole, it was all right. When I left the ghetto, something happened to me which was not so good. When I left the ghetto, that spring when I was already with my mother-- when my mother left the ghetto, she got false papers. We moved by ourselves. We were not dependent anymore on our Gentile friends. My mother saw them socially the whole time we were there, but we were independent.

I was crossing the street. That was just before the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising took place. I was crossing the street-- there was a little market across the street, a peasant market, a farmer's market-- to pick up something. And I was hit by a car that was driven by a German. I was hit against the curb. And I ended up in the hospital. And I was there for about a month. And I was unconscious for a long time. And I don't know what it's called in English what happened to me. I had a fractured skull, but it was more than that-- an infection. I was very ill.

And there was a time that the ghetto was burning. And my mother had my father in hiding at the time in her apartment. And my grandfather got out too. And my grandfather was kept by a Pole. And eventually my grandfather so-called committed suicide. What was happening is that this Pole would come every week and wanted money from my mother to keep my grandfather. And my mother just couldn't do it. After a while she just didn't have the money anymore.

So a few weeks later, he came to my mother, and he said that my grandfather was so desperate being alone and losing his wife, that he committed suicide. He hung himself. So my mother is not quite sure what happened there. But she hadn't seen him. How he died she does not know. But that's what this man told her, that he committed suicide.

So I did have an illness, and it lasted a couple of months, the illness. And then, when I got better-- and apparently I must have had such pain that when I was unconscious I must have been screaming so that they knew me in the hall. They knew who I was. And my mother said the first thing I asked when I became conscious was that if I can call my mother Mother because she actually had two different names. She was supposedly my godmother. She was my godmother, so I could still call her Mother. And she said, you can call me Mother. And then I noticed that my father was there. My father came a few times. And I could call him Father.

After this illness, after I got out of the hospital, my mother found a room in the village, in the country outside Warsaw. And we spent two months there in a peasant-- this was better than the peasant that I described before. There was a room upstairs which we had, Mother and I. But she wanted me in the country to recover, to recuperate.

And my father came there. My father had to leave Warsaw because he was being followed. That was the last time I saw my father. That was in summer of 1943. He came and he said he had to leave. He went to Lwów, to some friends, with a cousin of his. But he had full confidence that I would-- yeah, that I remember. He said, I have full confidence that you will survive and that your mother will survive, because your mother has a tremendous willpower to live and she's very resourceful.

So you saw him only briefly that time?

Yes, that's right. My father did not have such a strong will to live. He really didn't. My father's world stopped in 1939, that he loved. He loved the culture. He loved the things that he was part of. And he couldn't understand what happened. And he didn't want any part of it. And I really, truly believe that he did not want to live.

Do you know ultimately where he ended up?

Yeah, I do. I only want to say that I think that, after his mother was taken and other relatives were taken, it was just too much. And I don't think he was the only one. You can only take so much and no more. And even if you have a chance to survive-- and he would have because he didn't look Jewish at all. He had a very Aryan face. And he could have pulled through it. But I think that it was not in-- you have to have a wish to do it. Even with Schulz, when he was-- the things that he thought that this world was all about, or this culture was about, the things that he valued were all taken away. He died in Auschwitz, in Oświęcim.

He went to Lwów with his cousin. A lovely woman, by the way. Her sister lives in Israel now, and another sister is in Paris, Erica. And my father went to Lwów. And then he stayed there for a little while. And again he felt threatened, I guess. And the friend who provided housing, shelter for him felt so too. And the two of them left Lwów, and they went to Kielce. They visited a friend in Kielce.

And then from Kielce they went on the train. And my mother waited for them in Warsaw. They were supposed to arrive a certain time, and the train came and they weren't on it. Well, I didn't know about that. That my mother didn't tell me. That's when my mother suspected that something happened.

And eventually she got a letter from Auschwitz, sent by someone by the name of Kokoschka. His name is Kokoschka, and it was written in my father's handwriting. Kokoschka asked for food packages. Because, you see, Gentiles could receive food packages in Auschwitz, which Jews could not. So my mother was sending food packages right through all. Even though she didn't receive another letter from my father, she was sending food packages, whatever she could, whenever-- especially I remember garlic being sent because somebody said the garlic was very important for good vitamin. And the name Kokoschka stays in my mind because there's a very famous artist, Oskar Kokoschka. And this man was Czech, Kokoschka.

And then after the war was over, my mother first heard from an old friend of theirs who, by the way, was a coincidence, introduced them, my mother and my father. And he was also in Auschwitz. And he saw my father in Auschwitz, and he told my mother that he died. He had typhoid, and he died afterwards, starvation. And then my mother also went to Prague after the war, where there was an International Red Cross

quarters, and they had his name, Yakov Schulsinger. So there is no question about it that he died in Auschwitz.

I would like to back up for just a second. Before, you had said in Warsaw something about people going away but you weren't quite sure. Do you remember at what point in time you knew that people were going to concentration camps? Before, you had said that people would be randomly--

They were not -- They were going to Treblinka. They were going to extermination camps. When did we know that we were being exterminated?

Yes.

From the ghetto, the people were sent to Treblinka, which was an extermination camp. They were not sent to-- they were exterminated. We must have known that before. I don't remember when I knew it. I really don't. This is something my mother would know. I don't really remember when they-- we were scared, but I don't know. I didn't really know about it, that they were being sent to extermination camps, till I left the Warsaw ghetto.

My parents may have known before it. But I didn't. Let me think if there was any-- yeah, why were they so anxious? Of course they knew it, because they wouldn't be anxious for me to leave. It's never easy for parents to send their child off like that, so they knew. Even though they knew they may not be able to follow, they still sent me out. So they knew then already that it was extermination.

You know, they were trying to shield. Don't forget, I was very young. I was 10 years old. I was 10 years old. You only give so much to the child. Also, how much does a child take in? All children tend to protect themselves, and you know that this is part of our thing. So I think, even if something was told, we tried to push it away.

When we would be pushed up, moved out of the apartments, told us to go and get out, for instance, many times they would use not just Germans would work there, but Ukrainians, especially from the Balkan countries. The Lithuanians and Latvians did a lot of that dirty work for Germans. The Germans did their own, but they had these people helping out.

And one day my father was being pushed and the man saw a-- it was a Ukrainian, I'm sure-- saw a watch, a gold watch, and he took it off my father's arm. And I was really petrified because I thought he was going to kill my father, because he was pushing him and he was yelling at him until he got the watch and disappeared. That I recall. I was really terribly, terribly afraid for my father.

I had a very close relationship to my father. I was crazy about my father. I loved my mother, but I was crazy about my father. Because my mother was so wrapped in her career as a pianist-- and I don't know. When I think about it now, artists tend to be very self-centered. That's the nature of an artist. And my mother was. She had to do this and she had to do that, and she practiced for hours. And my father actually, from what I understand, encouraged this. He was very proud of her career. So as a result of it, my father gave me a lot of time.

And the traveling that I mentioned before, I did a lot of traveling with them. They really did insist that I go with them. And my father spent a lot of time with me. So I always felt very close to him. And after the war was over, I think the hardest thing for me to accept was the loss of my father, by far, because I always thought that he would walk in and he would be there. And I couldn't-- and then, of course, the enormity of all the other relatives that we've lost. The whole family.

Going back and saying, well, how do you feel about friends, not having-- how were your friendship? How about my family? My whole family went. It was a wonderful family. And this, I feel, as the older I'm getting, the more I miss it. I really do. I find it very hard.

In the period after your father went to Auschwitz, what happened to you? Did you grow closer to your mother? Did you attempt to become more independent?

I don't really think [INAUDIBLE]. No, I never really got closer to my mother. No. We were close. Oh, she was very important to me. I have to say that I went through it the way I did is because of my mother. That I may develop the way I did had something to do with my father, too, because a lot of times I would do things that I would say to myself my father would have liked it this way. It had a big effect on me.

As a matter of fact, I realized as I was doing things, how important those first few years of my life were which were normal-- the five years of my life and then the few years even during the war, when my father was still part of it, and my mother-- that what a tremendous influence it had on what I did subsequently. So he never was really that far away from me. I would say that. He had a very strong influence on me. And maybe even my relationship to my mother, too, at times. When it got a little sticky, I would think in terms of, well, she has gone through a lot herself. But that's not always easy. That's a rationale now, to bring that.

You were talking about the period after leaving the ghetto and being in a village or in a town.

Yeah. When we left this particular-- we were there for the summer. Then we went back to Warsaw. We also had a room in an apartment, which was not in the ghetto anymore. But it was bordering the ghetto, actually, the part of Warsaw. In this apartment there were about, I think, three families living. And I gathered afterwards that we were all Jewish, and that the landlady must have known about this. And she must have been one of those Gentile women who was helping, but didn't want-- obviously, must have been willing to help because she would not have had three people living there.

I was not going to school. I did not go to school. I was helping out a little bit financially because a lady in the apartment was baking. She was a gourmet cook and baker from Krakow, and this is how she was making a few extra zlotys. And I was taking the bakery from bakery to bakery. I mean the baking from bakery to bakery, for which she paid me. And then I found out later that in this box of cakes there were also a underground news which were distributed from BBC. And they were put into that box. It had double wall. And therefore-- innocently, but I was part of it-- I was distributing news to different sources.

And this continued till the Warsaw Uprising, which was in the end of the summer of 1944. The Russian troops were already on the other side of the Vistula. And there were trains. I think the Germans did expect to deport the population of Warsaw inside Germany, even without the uprising. So before this happened, the Polish underground made an uprising staged. And the whole city was totally bombed. Just the way the ghetto was bombed, the total city of Warsaw was bombed. And it was awful. Block by block by block.

During that time, I did help in a hospital. There were hospital rooms set up for the people who were wounded. And many children were part of the uprising, young boys 12, 13 years old, and girls. And I worked briefly there. But then I remember, too, many nights spending in the air shelter. And there again, by chance you survive, because one part of the air shelter could have been bombed and nobody got out, and another one we got out.

And then the whole population of Warsaw was deported into Germany to work in the factories and in the industry. That's how the industry was maintained in Germany.

Slave labor.

By slave labor. Right. During the whole war, people were taken from the street in different countries and sent inside Germany. And for months people would not know where their family, where their husband is mostly, but women too-- mostly men, where they went till they contacted them.

And we were sent away to a camp, which was a distribution camp in Breslau-- Breslau. And after we got there, we spent one night in a prisoner of war camp. They were Russian prisoners of war in this camp. And I could not believe what I saw, how those Russian prisoners of war soldiers were treated. They were treated just the same way as concentration camp inmates. They did not come under the Red Cross. And there was cannibalism going on. It was absolutely horrible.

And this may be one of the reasons, too, why the Russians were fighting to the last man, because they knew

what was happening to them afterwards. Or some of them who became collaborators, that's how they got out of this hell. But it was hellish. That camp was unbelievable. Unbelievable, what was done to them.

What were the living conditions physically? Did you have places to sleep?

Of the work camp.

Did you have food?

We were about 50 to an area, 50 to a bunk. And they were triple bunks. 50 in an area. Absolutely no privacy. The bathrooms were outside, and they were open. And I remember going to one, and a German soldier would stand at the door and grin. The sanitary facility were bad. Washing you had to do by your own bunk with a bit of water, unless there were a lot of lice, and then they would allow it. Then they would take you and make sure that you take your proper disinfectant.

The food was there. It was awful. But you did not starve to death. You were hungry all the time, but you didn't starve to death. There was a difference between concentration camp and work camp. And there was a concentration camp right next to ours, so we saw it. It was not an extermination camp. It was a concentration camp.

For instance, our job was in the city and the camp was outside the city. We could walk to work by ourselves. But we had curfew. We had to be back at a certain time. And we did have a sign on our clothes.

What kind of work did you do?

I worked in a factory, drilling holes in tubes with a very nice lady, Polish lady, who was very literary. Tell, recite poetry. And my mother used to file these tubes. And she was always afraid that she would ruin her hands, her pianist hands. And my cousin did something else. Inga was with us.

And then one day-- as my mother was constantly not only complaining, my mother was going to commit suicide every day she was going to work-- when we're eating in the common hall, one of the camp commanders walked in. And he said, does anybody speak French in here, because they had some French prisoners. And my mother said she did. And not only did they find out that my mother speaks French, but also Russian and German and Polish. And these were the languages that they needed. So they made her the official translator of the camp.

And she pulled me out of the factory as a result of it, [? through high ?] [? pull, ?] and I became a dishwasher, which would be in here a dishwasher, but very large kettles. And I worked in the kitchen. And my cousin became the official dressmaker for the ladies in the camp, for the wives of the officials of the camp. And this is how we had lived the last few months of the camp.

In the meantime, while my mother was inspecting all these camps and helping, she was to pick up a lot of lice, which I inherited. And I did get typhoid. And I did have a milder case of typhoid, I guess. I was in the hospital for months and obviously recovered. And by the time I got back to the camp-- and I was very hungry and needed a lot of food to recover-- the war came to an end. And the Russians came and liberated us. And we were never so happy to see anyone, especially people in concentration camps.

So how much time did you actually spend in the camp?

In the camp, we spent from '43 almost a-- well, we don't know. We were liberated in May of '45. And we got into camp September, October '44. So you figure the time that I was there.

Close to a year.

Yeah. But I do remember being in town-- I think I was with my mother at the time-- and seeing a group of ghostly column being chased through the town. And we realized they were inmates from Auschwitz, that before the Russians approached, the Germans decided to empty out the camp and take the prisoners, and

just take them. And they were just moved on. I never saw anything like it. It was unbelievable. The only thing I wished for at that point was that my father was not among them. That's how awful it was, that I wished that he did die. It was so horrible.

And the German population in this town, in Reichenbach, when they saw the ones who were out, were aghast. They gasped. And one woman tried to bring water, maybe more than one, to the prisoners. And the Germans would push them away. The SS would push them away. They couldn't come near them.

Was this the first time you saw the inmates?

Live, yeah. I saw concentration camp inmates who were in the camp next to our work camp. And they were in awful shape, too. They really were. And there were a number of shootings that took place there. There was a little wood nearby, a little group of woods. And the shooting would take place there. If somebody did not do what they were supposed to do, whatever it was, as a measure of punishment they were shot. But as horrible as they looked, they did not look as ghastly as that group did, as that column from Auschwitz.

Now, when you were liberated, what did you do?

When I was liberated?

Yes.

Well, first of all, when we were liberated-- first of all, I tried to run out of the camp before we were liberated, before we knew everything. I wanted to escape. And there was a barbed wire. Not an electric wire, a barbed wire. And I cut myself. And I still have the mark here and here. So I didn't get very far because it was a very deep cut, and I still have a mark from it. We did try to-- my cousin tried to escape. Not my mother. But we didn't. OK.

Then, when we were liberated, we left the camp. And we had to find some kind of place to live. And there were a lot of Germans who ran away. They all went ran west because they knew that they would be better off with the western than with the Russians, with the English and American and French than certainly with the Russians. So a lot of them ran.

And all the camp people went west. So there were some empty houses and empty apartments. So we moved into a house, onto the second floor of a villa that belonged to a German doctor. And that's where we went.

In the meantime, we needed everything. We had nothing. So my cousin and I-- not my mother. She wouldn't do that. We went into empty homes, empty places, and started picking up clothes and things in order to have something to wear. And within a day we looked out, and there was the Polish flag on the city hall. And we realized that it was Poland, you see. So we were right smack in Poland, because Lower Silesia, that area was given to Poland, while the eastern part of Poland was taken over by the Russians.

I have not found-- I, myself, have not experienced any unkindness-- and I mean it-- by the Russians. I was not scared of them. We had absolutely no encounter. Not only this, but we lived on the second floor of the villa for a while. On the first floor, there was some Russian army people living, soldiers. They were officers. And my mother entertained them. And we found out by chance-- or not by chance, one of them told us, he realized and I thought he had a feeling that we may be Jewish-- that he was Jewish. But he also did not speak about it, because he felt he was better off not broadcasting the fact that he was a Russian Jew, an officer in the Russian Army.

But we certainly have not found them to be in any way threatening any more than any army would be. And armies are usually are not always that-- you have to watch out, whatever soldiers you have.

How did they treat the Germans when they caught them?

The Russians?



Yeah.

I tell you, I haven't seen any mistreatment of the Germans, any more than I would mistreat. The owner of the factory, the manager of the factory where we worked, his wife became a domestic. They stayed. And she happened to work in our house. She didn't know who I was. But she complained to my mother afterwards. She can't understand her daughter because I always make her do the floors. Every time she came she had to scrub floors, and then my mother never straightened her out why.

[LAUGHTER]

The way I feel about the Germans is that I've never been back to Germany. I would not go back to Germany. And for me, to see Germans who are my age and older is really very difficult, because you wonder what they were doing during the war. And therefore, I don't really have any-- I really feel that they are responsible to what happened, and therefore I have no great sensitivity towards them, to put it mildly.

I did not find the Russians in this town mistreating the Germans any more than maybe another occupying-- I didn't. As a matter of fact, a lot of German girls used to sleep with these Russian soldiers when they got their stockings, or their chocolates, or whatever it was. And a lot of them had venereal diseases, and these young soldiers became sick. And there was a doctor who lived not too far from us, a German doctor who stayed. And he used to treat these soldiers. They used to spend a few days there because it was a regular shot of penicillin that they got.

One of these young soldiers I met, he wanted to marry me and take me with him to Russia. And he was going to take me and a cow. It was something.

[LAUGHTER]

Me and the cow. When they came into the villages or towns and they had some cattle there, the Russians would say you can take this back with you to your own place. And they did. They'd take it back with them. And then when they got to the border, the Russians would confiscate the cattle, because, of course, you cannot have more than your next door neighbor has. It wouldn't be right. So they took it away from them anyway.

Also, what the Russians did do, they took restitution. They took the machines in the factories, dismantled some of them. They took them inside Russia. And I absolutely felt no sorrow, no great--

Regret or something.

Regret. No, I was glad that they did this. Before the war was over, in 1944, while we were in Germany, for instance, we heard German-- I would walk back to the camp. And sometimes one of the guards would walk with me. And they would say that they can't understand why the Allies are fighting the Germans, that they should really fight with the Germans against the Russians. This I've heard in Germany in 1944. So there was this feeling that they should unite against the Russians.

Was is political or a racial attitude?

No, I think it was political, a communists thing. I also know that, as far as the occupation was concerned, the Poles certainly had much worse occupation than the French had, or the Belgian, or the Dutch. As bad as it was in Western Europe, it was worse in Eastern Europe, the occupation. The devastation of Poland, and probably the Soviet Union, was greater than in other places it was. So there was a great deal of prejudice, saying we had the worst. But the Poles had it, and the Russians had it, too.

Another thing is, if a Pole was captured who had saved a Jew, they met the same fate as the Jew did, a Gentile Pole. It did not happen to a Gentile French, or Belgian, or Holland. They would send them to concentration camps, but the punishment was not as great as the Pole had received. There were a lot of Poles who were killed. I don't remember now offhand, but they were a few million Poles who were killed

during the Second World War. It cannot be forgotten. They had a very bad siege with that.

And your Gentile friends, were they Polish?

The Gentile friends who saved us were at the time 24 years old. They were young women. They were beautiful women. As you've see in the picture of her now, she's a very attractive woman now. She was beautiful, Kristina, and so was her sister-in-law. And they had a fairly easy life because they came from comfortable backgrounds. And in 1942 and '43, they really were not in bad shape at all. Only through their involvement with people like us did they come into a different situation. And they chose to do it.

These friends of ours had a much stronger impact on me than I had realized at the time. It really influenced my whole life, what they have done, because I do know that you make a difference, that what you do is what counts. And regardless what the government policy is, or what the government, the establishment, whatever, is doing, that you can make it. You can make something. Not many of us are given an opportunity like Kristina and Socha to save people and make this, but to a lesser degree they are.

And the only time I can compare it to in this country, really, is the Civil Rights Movement. And when my brother-in-law, my husband's brother, went to Mississippi for the voter registration in the early '60s, it was a very dangerous time. And people did put their life on the line for it. And then again, there are not too many people who would do that. And if they do it, or they don't-- if they don't do it, one cannot criticize them for it, because you're taking not only your life, but your family life and everything else you affect by this.

I heard someone say this week that where there were many, many conspiracies of evil, there were also conspiracies of goodness.

Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

And we have to remember that.

Well, actually, my mother says that in Warsaw, known, 50,000 Jews had been living on the other side, because this is what the American Joint Distribution used to send things-- I didn't realize that-- even during the war, I guess, '43, '44. And there were 50,000 known Jews living on the other side. For 50,000, they must have been at least 100,000 non-Jews who were helping, because you needed a minimum of two to help one person. So they already have 100,000, which is quite a number.

Where did you live after the war and before you came to the United States?

When I came to--

Before you came to the United States.

I lived for a year in Poland. And I went right away to Polish high school, and I loved it. I didn't want to leave Poland. It was the first time I had a normal situation. And I think that was very important to me, to have a school, and to have friends, and to be able to live a normal life. And I became a Girl Scout. I was always a bit of a rebel. I didn't join the Communist Youth. I joined the Girl Scouts, which was the opposite, you see. So even if I had remained in Poland, I don't think I would have been a Jerzy Urban. I probably would have been on the other side. But who knows?

And we had an interesting group of young people, because it was an interesting generation of the year. We are now in the 50s, but we were teenagers. And from our group came quite a few of very-- I could think of, when you think of the movies and of the directors, and well-known directors, Wajda, all these people now, they are about that age. Or Kosinski, the author.

This was culture of Poland, the writers and the--

Yeah, but also our experiences were such. And we had to be quite independent, too, because of the things that happened to us, and resourceful. It was fun. I didn't want to leave Poland. And I was in love with a

young fellow, who became later on a very well-known movie actor. We had a lot of good times together in a short time, because we had to do things quickly, because there wasn't that much time. We had to make up all the time that we lost with everything.

But my mother wanted to leave Poland, because she said there was no place for Jews. And I didn't really feel Jewish, for different reasons. One of them I mentioned before. I had very negative feelings about the ghetto and what happened there. And one thing, too, that occurred to me during that time-- I used to ask myself why am I there. Why am I in the ghetto? I didn't feel Jewish. I didn't have any real Jewish association. But it was strange. And then I said, well, I am. That's why I'm in this ghetto.

And so after the war was over, and as the years that I was on false papers, I was as a Catholic. I never converted to Catholicism, and eventually had very negative feelings about Catholicism. But I just didn't have any Jewish feelings. And I didn't see any reason to leave. But my mother did. My mother said this is not a place for us to stay. We have to get out.

And there was a Rabbi Schonfeld in England. Wow. He knew what was going on with the Jews under occupied countries during the war. And he had made it a mission. His work was to see how he can take Jewish children who survived the Holocaust to England. And anyone in Poland, and also displaced person camps-- well, he didn't know they were displaced person camps at the time, but in Germany to have survived concentration camps.

And we heard about Rabbi Schonfeld really through my aunt in London, who heard about him and knew him. He had a large congregation in London, an Orthodox congregation. It was also a school with it. He was a Chief Rabbi of London for quite a while. And his brother was a professor of philosophy at Oxford. So that's a very well-known family.

And he had the contacts that he needed. And he approached the British government and said that he would bring the youth over, but they wouldn't become a burden to the British government, that they would be supported by the Jewish community, either by adoption or by financial aid. And at this point, towards the end of the war, the British government gave him the OK. So as soon as the war was over, Rabbi Schonfeld went to Poland. And he met the government officials and gave them the proposal, and they agreed.

And I met him, either Łódź or Warsaw. I forgot which city. I saw him the first time in 1946. And he was eating in a regular restaurant. And he had a beard. He was very handsome, a very handsome man. He was eating with some officials. And even I knew, as little as I knew about Judaism, that you don't eat in a regular restaurant when you are a rabbi in Orthodox.

I just want to tell. When we were on the boat, leaving Poland to go to Sweden, and I asked Rabbi Schonfeld, Rabbi, I saw you at this restaurant and you were eating regular food. And he said, to get you kids out of Poland, I would eat with the devil himself. That was a very well-put thing. And he would have been excused for that.

Anyway, he had three transports that left Poland. And there were about 150, 200 kids in each transport. And I was in one of them. It was in the fall of 1946. And my mother, after I left to come to London-- via Sweden I went to London-- my mother went to Vienna illegally. And in Vienna, she lived with some friends. And she did do some concertizing, play, company. And she came to London in 1948. '47 or '48. I'm not sure. A year, year and a half after I did. As a domestic. That's the only way she could come in. And she worked as a domestic for my uncle and aunt. So that's how we got out of Poland.

There's something I wanted to say about Poland yet when we left. I don't remember. It escapes me. Maybe it'll come back. But we went through Sweden, where we had another delousing tour, because before we could go on and come in, they wanted to make sure that we were clean. And then came to London, where my aunt met me.

It must have been very difficult for my aunt. I only looked at myself, because I was the only one of her immediate family who survived. Her mother died. Her brother died. Her cousins, and many people that she held very dear to herself died.

Was this your aunt on your father's side?

It was my father's sister, who left Germany in 1933. And only recently did I hear about the reason why she left already in '33. For instance, as a lawyer-- and she had a PhD in Law, and she was accepted to the bar-- she could not argue cases in 1933 in the court as a Jew. She could see clients. She could work it out. But she could not go into court with it. And that was in 1933.

So she moved?

So she moved. And her husband did. And when she got to London, she did not want to pass the bar again. She couldn't see that, because she would not just pass the bar, she would have to go through law school. My uncle passed. And my uncle took the medical boards, and he continued practicing medicine in London.

And my cousin was born in London. She went there when she was pregnant already in 1933. She also wanted her child to be born in England and not in Germany. So she had tremendous foresight. There were some who left in 1933 and 1934.