

Please continue, Lucy.

So he gave me a letter to this administrator of the HKP unit, which was located at the outskirts of Vilna. It was also a place where before, military units were stationed during the Polish government. And there were few buildings there.

I came into this so-called [GERMAN]. [GERMAN] is meant in German, we would say here, this administrator probably. The one who took care of the payroll and everything. And a very tall man in pince-nez. And very, very--

Stern. --strict-looking. He just doesn't look at me because I was wearing my yellow star. I gave him the letter and looked at this. He says, we have no Jewish women working here. I says, I know. But I mean, maybe you would be able somehow to find me somewhere in the kitchen for the laborers or something to wash dishes, or scrub the potatoes, or something. No, we don't have any.

And then how do you speak German so well? I said, I studied German in Gymnasium. I graduated from a Polish school, but I know German. And he picked up the phone. He called somebody, and Polish name. And he says, listen, can you find work there in the kitchen, something for a Jewish? She seems to be pretty good, and she's probably going to be a good worker.

And I hear somebody said-- and he puts away, he says, OK. Doesn't look at me. Go over there to the other place and you'll get somebody by the name Jarmuske, which [INAUDIBLE] a Volksdeutsche he was. It wasn't Polish Deutsch, it was Polish-- they lived in Poland, but they were German by--

Affluence, held.

Yeah. And I came, but he spoke perfect Polish. And I spoke a perfect Polish, of course, also. And he take a look at me, he says, where did he get you? I said, from the ghetto. He says, and in Polish, very polite, but how can you? It's not for you to work here. I said, what do you mean it's not for me? Scrubbing toilets is better? I just told him like this. I think the work is perfect for me. So he went with me.

And happened that, in his kitchen, an old Jewish man was working. He called him Mr. Blat. A very nice older man. He says, OK, I'll bring you to Mr. Blat. Maybe you can help him up. Because he has something to do with distributing bread and everything, and he's a very nice man. I saw already that he has his own job.

So Mr. Blat, for some reason, I don't know what it was. Maybe he was afraid that I'm going to be competition to him. He says, I have no work for her. Maybe you can put her somewhere in the kitchen. He said, OK, let's go to the potato room. And there are sitting six or seven Polish women there, young girls, a little older than me. And he puts me, gives me a knife, and he says, OK, sit here and scrub potatoes.

I started talking, and the girls were peasant girls, you know. And they took a look at me, and they see that I am something, a different caliber. Says, did you go to school? I said, yes, I went to school. You graduated school? I said, yes. So what are you doing here? I said, one little thing, I'm Jewish. In that way, I just plain told them.

Oh, he says, yeah, I know what they are doing to the Jews here. You know, some like they were sorry, I know if they were sorry, they were not sorry. But they pretended that they were sorry. And I must say, they were very nice to me. And they even taught me the skills of scrubbing potatoes, because I didn't know it too well. I at home didn't have a chance to do it too much. And we became even friendly.

And what the most important thing was, I was able to bring home a piece of bread and a piece of meat. Because this was a kitchen not for the Germans, because the Germans had a special kitchen, but this was for the Polish and Jewish workers. And the Jewish workers came from the ghetto there. And as I found out later, my husband was the one who worked there already.

Really?

They used to leave the ghetto 4:30 in the morning, wearing these wooden clogs. You know, when everybody was still asleep, and come home 7:00, 7:30 at night. But even the men felt good there. Because as I said, there was a military unit, there were no Gestapo there. They were all military men.

German military?

German military men. And they were really-- some of them were very decent people. They were even talking to us and discussing even politics with us. You know, it was really amazing. And I was the only Jewish woman. After a while, I decided, it's good, but how can I bring my sister here? I would like her also to come here.

So one day, I got sick. And when I was working there, I got a certificate, a blue certificate that I work there. I got sick, I gave her my certificate. I said, you go with the party. Because they didn't check, there were like a couple of hundred people who went there. And they were in groups of 10. And for every 10 people, there was a [GERMAN] from the Jewish people who were responsible nobody should escape.

So they knew me, that [GERMAN]. I said, look, I want to send my sister instead. OK. My sister came there, and the manager of the kitchen liked her. And she was a good cook always. He says, good, I need somebody who can take care of the kettles here of the soups. Next time, we came together already. And we were working already together there. And we were going, as I said, with these people.

After a while, they established-- they saw that we were not bad, the two of us. They established a laundry room for the Germans. But they decided they can employ the Jewish women who work, who come from the ghetto. They call it the [GERMAN]. And quite a few girls came to work there. And we were already, I would say, about 10-15 girls working there.

So the laundry room was across from our kitchen. What we did very often, we would steal a few potatoes from in the containers and bring to them to the-- because they didn't have. We had something to eat in the kitchen. They hadn't.

So some of them are still alive here, and they remind us how we used to steal the potatoes. And my sister was perfect. I was very bad, but she was perfect with stealing the potatoes, and bringing to them. And they would warm it up next to the kettles with their laundry.

And I must say that even the people, the Jews who worked for this unit, they lived in a special-- together, the special block in the ghetto. Because it was easier for the Germans to collect them and take them. So you have to remember that we were not allowed to go alone. If we went, we had to have or a group, or to be accompanied by German soldier or whoever it is.

Excuse me, where was your mother at this time?

My mother was in the ghetto. She wasn't working.

She wasn't working.

She wasn't well?

She took care of the little girl.

Your stepsister?

No, not-- my niece.

Oh, your niece. Oh, your sister's daughter.

My stepsister and my stepbrother, we somehow got lost in the ghetto. Because he has his own children. And in a time like this, my mother wants to be with her children and he wanted to be with-- not that they divorced or something, but he wanted to be closer to his family. And what happened to them later, I don't even know.

Because we got-- I think he worked for a while for the Judenrat. And he was very-- he was sure that because of the Judenrat, he'll be able to escape. But something happened, and they were taken away. And my mother took care of the little girl. She was going to school, and she used to go out and play with children.

But I didn't live in this area all the HKP people lived. Because they lived there from the beginning and I was a newcomer. So we remained already where we lived before.

And meanwhile, the life in the ghetto was going on. I remember, they established a cafe in the ghetto. And they had even a theater in the ghetto. I don't know if you saw there was a play. I refused to go to see it. Because I knew what it's about. And I decided that they showed it in a very bad light. And it wasn't in the favor of the people.

Yes, it was called Ghetto, I think.

Called Ghetto. And I didn't go to see it. I was really very upset about it. Because they showed things-- my opinion, maybe I'm wrong. The people think that you have to show everything the way it was. It's true. But if you exaggerate the bad things in favor of the good things, in my opinion, it's not necessary for the people who never went it through or if you didn't know what was behind it.

But it was a cultural life. We had lectures. We had a beautiful library, a friend of mine. It happened that the library, which was there all the time, remained in the area where the ghetto was.

So we had the library. I remember, I being in ghetto, I read the book *Gone with the Wind* translated into Polish while I was in the ghetto. It was just translated from English into Polish.

To your knowledge, were Jewish studies going on there, too? Because Vilna was always called the Jerusalem of--

Was the Jewish--

--Eastern Europe.

See, I can't tell you. Because I happened not to be-- first of all, we didn't have a man in the family, OK? And that they used to-- I remember Yom Kippur, they used to get together and daven. And some people used to have a minyan also. They used to go and have a minyan. But there was no-- I don't think there was a shul there.

Was your mother at all religious?

My mother was religious, but not Orthodox. See, my mother was very Jewish. Like, she told me, when I went to this Polish school, she told me that even if you go to a Polish school, in our house, we speak Yiddish. She was a very smart woman, a very smart woman. And she has a very, very-- we had a very religious uncle who had [YIDDISH] for a bonus. And my mother knew the [YIDDISH].

So he was going to shul for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, they were going to the [INAUDIBLE]. And she was discussing all this with my uncle. And she was the only one who dared to talk to him. And she used to give him questions that sometimes he couldn't even answer her. He used to go and get mad, and then [YIDDISH], he used to say. But she said, [YIDDISH] why is it like this? Anyway, but she knew Hebrew.

We were, and for a long time, we had even a kosher house at home. But after my father died, my aunt came to live with us. And somehow, she mixed up the dishes, and my mother said, that's it. I'm not going to bother anymore. But we were very Jewish.

And true, I didn't belong to the-- it's funny, I didn't belong to the Jewish part of that-- Jewish, Jewish part of that population. Because I belonged to a Zionist movement. But the Zionists were--

Vilna, the young Jewish people belonged to certain groups. One group were the Bundists you know, the-- one group was ever more to the left. One group were the Betar, it was the very right Zionist. One group was the liberal Zionist, like I was. So we usually stayed with our own and we didn't mix.

For instance, I never met my husband before the war. Because he belonged to the Yiddish part. His father, I think, was a member of the Social Democrats in the 1905. And we didn't even-- between my friends at home, I spoke Yiddish. But with my friends, we always spoke Polish. That's how we were used to. Even in the Zionist organization, we used to speak Polish. They used to call us the intelligentsia, they used to call us.

The Orthodox did not belong to the Zionist youth movements?

There was an Orthodox Zionist group. It was--

Agudat Yisrael.

Agudat Yisrael, yes. Agudat Yisrael.

That was for them. But then--

Yes.

So very separate, though from the--

But you said you were a liberal Zionist.

We were liberals. Well, we had among both us religious girls also. It has not to do with it. I mean, we didn't interfere in each other's business. If they didn't want to go Friday or do, that was their business. But this was not our main-- this was not the most important thing in our movement. We wouldn't go around and, let's say, smoke cigarettes Friday night or do something.

I was fasting Yom Kippur my whole life. And by the way, this I have to add here. While I was working with this Mr. Blat in the kitchen-- I will never forget, it was Yom Kippur. And I came, and we were dividing bread for the workers. And it came lunchtime. I refused to eat. He says, why don't you eat it? I said it's Yom Kippur. I never missed fasting Yom Kippur.

He says, but this is a sin, now we're starving. I said, never mind, I am not going to die of it. And you know something, up to this day, I never missed fasting Yom Kippur. And I never missed going to shul Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. You know, everybody has his own religion. This is my [INAUDIBLE]. And not because everybody's doing it, but because that's the way.

You remember.

Because my mother was like this. My mother, I remember, when I was going to a Polish school, we had off the Jewish holidays. So one Rosh Hashanah, I remember, I was staying in bed late. And I said, mother, I says, what's the matter? Why don't you get up? I said, I have off today, it's Rosh Hashanah. She says, we have two choices. Either you get up, you go to school, or you get up and you go to shul with me, to daven.

So of course, I went up, and I went to shul. Who is going to? And since there, also, this has remained with me. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the holidays for me. And I go to shul, and I pray, and I do everything what all the religious Jews do. But I have my own ways. That's the way I am.

OK, so my sister was also working this HKP. And this was going on till-- in meanwhile, of course, we had all these Aktions in the ghetto, which probably you heard about. All of a sudden, they would close up the gates and nobody can get out.

The Gestapo is here. And they go from door to door, whoever they feel like, they take away. Most of the time, men were at work somewhere. If somebody was there, they would just take them and that's it.

And by the way, when they were taking these people away in the beginning, we ourselves believed, or maybe we wanted to believe, that they were taken to work. They were taken to work to labor camps, and eventually we will see them, they will come back.

And there was a reason for it also. They were so sophisticated in their methods, the Nazis. They would take away, for instance, a group of old people somewhere. Before they would send them to Ponary, they would put them to a place and give them something to eat. And make them to write a letter that we are so and so, we feel very good, and we are very happy.

And the letter would come to the ghetto. So if you see something like this, see? What are the people talking about? They are talking about that people are being shot in Ponary. That's not true. Look, they went away, they have a good time there, and they were taken care. They being fed perfect food. And on the other hand, probably people didn't want to believe in it. That's why.

You are talking about hiding places. Yes, I was once in a hiding place, even in the ghetto. This was, we found out-- the children were always the messengers. Children were running around the streets. And they would come, [INAUDIBLE] is here, SS is here. And people would know there that you have to start watching. So in one place, we are there.

And people made-- there was a closet somehow. And they camouflaged the closet. We were all in the closet. And the Germans came and they looked through. Some things, they were very thorough. And some where they would just come. And we were alive, that we survived. So this was the so-called, they called it malinas. Some people made permanent hiding places. Some people managed, you know, people who had skills.

And after a while, out of, we had in the beginning in Vilna around 75,000 people with the refugees who came from the Western part. And when we went to the ghetto, the amount was really smaller. And after a few Aktions, the amount was already 20,000 only left.

And these people had special yellow certificates, which were actually the certificate of life. Because according to the Germans, these people who had a yellow certificate, they and their family, it means husband, wife, two children are safe. They're going to work, and nobody's going to be taken away. But everything comes to an end.

And it came a time, when this was the end already of 1943. And all of a sudden, our foreman from the Jewish people who worked in this HKP said that, most probably, the people who work here will be transported, removed from the ghetto to a special place to a labor camp in Vilna. We didn't know why at that time. We knew that maybe it is easier for them to have all the people in one place.

And I remember, I was sent-- I, my sister and I and another maybe 15 women were sent away. This was in the middle of August. Maybe in the beginning or the second half of August. To a place in trucks. We were sent away with pails and brushes to clean up the place where we are going to be moved.

And we came to a place, which was-- I never was there before, but I knew it was a place for older people, elderly sick people. A Jewish place, like an old age home, maintained by the Jewish community. But when we came, of course, there were no Jewish people there. Somebody was there, because we saw remainders of food, like a piece of potato. Somebody who ran away at the last minute, a glass of water.

Well, turned out they kept there the Russian prisoners of war wives. They concentrated them also to have them in case they want to take them away for hard labor or something. So they removed them the same as they removed the other

people from the ghetto when they brought us. They removed them. And we were supposed to come and clean up the place and make it livable for our few hundred people who worked there in HKP.

And the only thing we asked right away, is our mother and my niece going to come? They said, don't worry, everybody will come. You'll just have to clean up the place. So we came there, and we cleaned up the place, and true within a week, our families came. And then we found out why they removed us. Because the ghetto was supposed to be already liquidated in September.

And apparently-- we didn't know. This is everything which we didn't know. But at that time, we thought that our-- our boss was a military man called, at that time, Hauptmann [Personal name] He was a lieutenant, a very decent man. The boss of the whole HKP.

We saw only him a couple of times he came when we were still going out from the ghetto to work. And he even shook hands with Jews, which we couldn't believe. How is it possible a German officer should shake hands with Jews? So we put everything together. We decided that probably, he wants to save his Jews. I know how for long, but if they have to die, they should die the last ones. That's what his policy.

And we went there. At that time, my husband, though he worked in HKP, he wasn't there. He was already with the resistance. But he arranged that his father and his mother and his brother should be put in the HKP. Because he had people who were friends of here who were arranging and placing the people there. He says since I was a worker here, my family belongs there. Even if I'm not there.

You didn't know him yet?

No, I knew him from working, from going to ghetto to work together. But we didn't. Sometimes we went together to work. But sometimes he would come and I would give him the soup, you know. And I remember very well that his container was always the cleanest. So I used to sometimes give him a double portion.

And we were placed there. And I must tell you, in the beginning, it was a place-- we were really shocked, because the place was wired. And we were closed up completely. Were two huge buildings. I think 7/8 stories. For us, it was huge. And there was a gate and soldiers. Nobody was allowed to go out. And nobody was allowed to go in.

But actually, to this, we were used in the ghetto also. And we were supposed to serve the German military. In what way? Over there, they were working with auto parts and tank parts.

Here, we were supposed to help in their housekeeping. It means if they need a tailor, or a shoemaker, or electrician, or a mechanic, these are also called-- he called us, this Hauptmann [Personal name] he called us old professionals. That's why he's saving us. Because the German country is going to lose the war without us. That was his policy.

And even who was not the professional became a professional there, you know. Because otherwise you weren't allowed to be there. And the women organized tailor shops, and they were knitting, and they were making clothes. They were mending the uniforms. Things like this. So we were the useful jobs, they called us. We were the useful jobs.

All ages?

All ages. Because whoever worked there was allowed to take the family. And each family was allowed-- we were not allowed to have children, by the way, in the ghetto. The women who came into the ghetto, children were forbidden. Nobody was allowed to have a child in the ghetto. If somebody had a child in the ghetto, it was illegal.

You mean to give birth or to already have?

To give birth, to give birth.

I see.

Or to have. So when we came here, the Jews themselves wanted to save for a while as many as possible. So what they did, for instance, I was a woman who worked there. And my sister worked there. We were allowed to take somebody as a husband. And have him and the child.

My sister had a child, so she couldn't take anybody. I was too young to have a child. So all I could have is a husband. So we were both officially married to two brothers. They were twins. One brother was my husband, one brother was my sister's husband. And by the way, one of them is alive. And we meet very often. And he still refers to me sometimes, oh, this is my first wife. He always whenever we meet.

What was the Advantage

Advantage? That we could save four people and one worker.

Oh, I see.

And he also, they also had a mother. So we could save their mother. So actually, and I must tell you that we had a room at that time. In our room, we had nine people. But it wasn't so bad. Because there were two families and very nice people. Officially, we actually were supposed to live with our so-called husbands. But everybody knew they are not.

So we just, for the roll calls, they would come and stay next to each other. And I had even a different name there. Because their name was Litsky, I had was Litsky, since he was the husband. And then he would go home. I was with my mother, my sister, and my niece.

But one woman was always in charge of the rooms. So the floor was scrubbed and everywhere was clean. And since we, my sister and I, worked in the kitchen, we always could sometimes bring an extra little soup for the whole thing. And how did we? But how did we live? How did the food, how did they acquire it? It wasn't enough, the 125 grams which they gave to us. So we had to find means of feeding ourselves.

OK, there was a way. There were a few of us men who knew the people around in the neighborhood. And we used to call them the [POLISH]. You know, they used to bring in food. How would they do it? They would bribe for a small bribe the guards in the middle of the night when they leave the place.

As I said, there was no Gestapo there. There were all military men, and with a soldier, you can make a soldier's soldier. For a couple of bottles of vodka, he would. And they would go to the peasants and would exchange whatever we had.

This is, for instance, I was making with my mother-- from old socks, we were knitting sweaters. So we knit a sweater, we give a sweater to him. For the sweater, he would bring some food. And whatever they brought was collectively given to the cooperative people. And by the way, one of the cooperative people was my husband's father, who was an extremely honest man. And I think ruled over the others also.

And they would divide it somehow to the people, to the neediest. Like some who had children, they would give it to the children, the sugar or a little fat. And the rest would go into the kettle to the kitchen. And my sister and other girls who worked there, they would cook it.

And it would, as a result, we would have a better meal also. Not what they give us, a little water. OK, the better meal if we had a piece of potato and a piece of vegetable. And once in a while, a piece of horse meat, it was already better. But normally, we wouldn't get it. So actually, we managed ourselves.

And there was no jealousy, there was nothing somehow. I remember, even one of my girlfriends got married. So my mother made a kugel of potato peels for her. And this was the cake we celebrate. And as I said, we were getting used to it.

We knew somewhere that there are partisans somewhere after the ghetto. Because our Germans used to tell us that we

are afraid. And that the partisans are going to bring death to us. Because of them, we might perish. So everything was kind of OK. We got used to it.

But the only thing that we couldn't get used in there, we were still exposed to the atrocities of the Gestapo and SS. All of a sudden, out of the blue sky, this, they had the privilege. They could come in and call everybody to a roll call. And if they wished to take away 100 people, nobody could do anything to them. Even our good Germans couldn't do anything.

So once, I remember, in the middle of the day, there was a roll call. And we were standing all lined up. And this, there was [? Kita, ?] there was a known dog. He was known in Vilna ghetto. He was the one who was in charge of all the Aktions taking away the people to Ponary and everything. A young officer. He would come and line everybody up.

And I remember this one time, very-- he always had a reason. Somebody escaped, apparently. Somebody they found and they brought into the ghetto, into the camp. And by the way, once they did bring three people who they found. They were wearing civilian clothes, and they were brought to the camp. And in front of us, they hanged them, in order to show what's going to happen. This was awful. I will never forget this sight.

So once they started counting. And I think about a few numbers before me, he cut off. So again, fate, yeah? If he would count a little more, I would be in this. Our whole family remained.

And it's awful to say, but we even got used to this already. I mean, there was no choice. We were very used. And I must say that in spite of everything, some of us were optimistic. We somehow thought that somehow we will survive. We don't know. But some how people were talking. Some had radios, and they're talking about the invasion.

I was just going to ask you, did you know anything about what was going on?

Yeah, yeah, because they would bring this news from outside world.

D-Day and France.

Yeah, we knew. As a matter of fact, I will never forget it, there was a woman there who spoke only Yiddish. In the Yiddish, the word [YIDDISH], it it was [YIDDISH]. So she used to say, while she came to this, [YIDDISH]. [YIDDISH] is a vase, but we all knew what she meant. That the invasion, that they finally did it.

And we all were waiting for the second front to open. Because this, we thought-- our Germans were talking to us. And they used to tell us, you know, it's no good. It's no good, the situation.

We had an agronomist among us. And he made a garden, and we were planted tomatoes. So I will never forget. This German comes to us, and he's [GERMAN]. We thought he meant about us. But he meant about them.

That they wouldn't get to eat any.

And this was true. They never survived to eat the tomatoes. But the worst experience was the Kinderaktion. This, I will never in my life forget. It was March 27, 1944. They came and they said, something is going on. The Gestapo came. And something is going on. We don't know what it is.

Some people said it's children. Some people said it's older people. They never knew, but we never knew what they were going to do. But the rumors were persistent that it was for the children. We never knew, I think, like too, because in the ghetto, they never took children. We had this little girl.

And since my sister was in the kitchen, she worked with the boss of the kitchen. Everybody was trying to hide the children. She says, I'm going to hide her with other children in the potato cellar behind the potatoes. And this girl, I will never forget. I have to say it in Yiddish, because that's the way she says to me. [YIDDISH] With tears in her eyes. And we schlepped her to this potato cellar and we put her there.



Meanwhile, we had a doctor in the camp. And the doctor came to my sister, he says, listen, maybe I can put my two girls into one of your kettles. She says, go ahead, but this is the first thing they're going to look for. They'll come to the kitchen. And he put.

And guess what, his children survived. And her little girl was taken away. And she was begging the Germans, take me along. No. And this is, I think, the worst experience from what I went through was this. I will never forget it. We don't know what they did to them. But this was horrible. Then it was March. In June, it was after the invasion already. Invasion was June 9th.

June 6th.

6th, yes. This somewhere in the middle of June. Our [GERMAN], the boss, came. He made a roll call. A grip. They shook hands with every single Jew who was there. And he says, I really enjoyed having you here. And I hope that you didn't suffer too much. I was trying to make easiest as much I could.

He said he was as pharmacist by profession. And there was a woman who was a pharmacist. He used to bring drugs for her for the Jews to the pharmacy from the German supply. To such an extent.

And he says, but up till now, you were under my jurisdiction. But starting next week, the SS and the Gestapo is going to take over. He didn't have to say anything else to us. In other words, he put it our, you people do whatever you think you can do.

He warned you.

He warned us. And you know, because he warned us, this was one of the reasons why quite a few of us were saved.

Because the men who could, they started looking for ways out. Some of them jumped through the window, some of them went out, as I said, they had some people-- it was already close to the end of the war. So the Gentile people wanted also help a little bit if they could.

But we were-- we went as I said. We had nobody even here, so we were just left to ourselves. And we couldn't do anything. And sure enough, the end of this was, I remember it was-- at that time, I didn't know about July 4th. But this was the 3rd of July. When they came, the Gestapo and the SS came. And they started collecting everybody. Raus, raus. And they didn't even-- everybody, no question. Yes, the man, woman, child, out.

By the way, we had, after the Kinderaktion, a few children were saved. But legally, they had no right to exist. So we had to camouflage them. So what they did-- on the very last floor, they closed off the door completely. And they left from one apartment. And they left the entrance through an oven. And through this oven, the children were put there.

And with them, listen to this, a teacher, a Jewish teacher offered himself to stay with them there and teach them. Because if they were to be alive, they had to know how to write and read. He was singing Yiddishe, Jewish songs with them. He was there. And the food was delivered through this opening.

I didn't know where the room was. I just knew that the children exist here. My mother, for some reason, knew about it. So when the Gestapo came and dragged him downstairs, on the way, she says, wait a second. Let's go, I know a room. Let's go to this room, maybe it will be able to escape.

And we pushed through the room. And we came, there were already maybe 30, 40 people there who knew about it. And we were sitting there for two nights. And we heard-- two nights, no. One night only, I'm sorry. One night. And we heard how all these people were driving down. And they were taking them in trucks. And then it got quiet.

And you were in the room through the oven?

Yeah, through the oven. With my mother, with my sister. The girl wasn't there, right. By the way, all the time, wherever

I went, I took along my students book. You know, I had one year accomplished of-- I didn't take anything. But this book was always with me, wherever, even here, I took this book. I had it on me.

And I came there. And we were sitting there for a long time. And it was funny, I still remember. There was a little opening. How do we call it in English? They don't have it here. An opening in the window, like a--

Louver?

A [POLISH] we used to call it in Polish. You opened not the whole window, but just to air out. And this and this little thing was left open, and the wind was. And I was afraid. I said, oh, my god, this-- the Germans are downstairs. This might attract their attention. And they might start looking for this room. But they don't know, there is no door.

And what do you know, after a while, they discovered it. I don't know if somebody told them. But they came and they started screaming, out, out, out, we know you are here. But they were afraid to come in. Because they were afraid that maybe Jews, thinking about the practices, maybe they have weapons.

Remains.

So everybody, they did say. The whole oven was taken apart. And they were standing outside only two Germans only. Because they were in a hurry at that time. They didn't know what's going to happen to them. And they, raus, raus, raus. And I was wanted to go the first one.

My mother schlepped me, she says, for the death, you don't have to rush. You can go the last one. You don't have to go the first one. Then I wanted to jump from the window. I said, I don't want to. She says, don't jump, because you have in your pocket, this [POLISH], how do you call it, the poison.

Cyanide.

Cyanide.

My stepfather gave it to us before going together. In case we came to the Germans' hand, we should commit suicide and swallow. She says, you have it, so in worst case, you'll swallow it. And don't jump from the window, we don't know yet. I said, Ma, what are you talking about? We are going to death.

And to make a long story short, it was only a couple of Germans, and it was a few stories. And while we were going down, we noticed a toilet door. They had the toilets not on every floor, but over a floor it was a toilet. Or just a toilet seat with a [INAUDIBLE]. So my sister schlepped me there. And we left the door of the toilet half open. And we were sitting one on top of the other on the toilet seat.

And guess what, the German didn't open this door. They went down, and this door wasn't open. And we were sitting. It was already 4th of July, the night after this. No, from the 4th to the 5th. And we were sitting there. We were looked awful. We were sitting the whole night. And we heard outside screaming, they didn't have time already to take the people to Ponary. They were shooting them on the spot over there. On the spot, wherever they found, they were shooting.

And then it got quiet in the morning. So I got up. There was a little window. And I take a look, I see nobody is quiet, nobody is here. I said to my sister, let's go. We have to go somewhere. We can't just stay here forever. They are gone. They're not here anymore. And we went out. We looked awful. Imagine our hair and after so many nights not washing, nothing. And we started going through the gate. And we went through the gate and went out.

Of course, we didn't have our signs, nothing. But how can we face anybody the way we looked? We had a woman who worked for us as a maid lately. And I knew she lived there. So we came to her. And she got scared like how, she says, please don't come in. They're going to kill me, they're going to kill. They were afraid, really. Because the Germans were still here.

I said, we're not going to stay. Give us only a little water. We'll wash our hair and we'll leave in a half an hour. We'll go somewhere. So she gave us water and we washed our hair. And she says, and what are you going to do? You and your sister, OK, but mother speaks so bad Polish. They will right away, they will recognize that she's Jewish

I said, look, it's our risk. We will go. We'll see what will happen. Just give us the water. And she gave us a piece of bread. And we started going.

Then we found out-- again, fate. The Germans were still there. They left for a while to go to the dead bodies to look for jewelry or something. Maybe now work. And that was the moment when we left. And then after us, a couple of girls wanted to get out, and they got shot on the spot.

God.

So can you believe in fate? I don't know. You have to. And that was it. And then we went to out. And we had no place to go. And we knew that the Vilna is in flames. They are fighting like crazy, the Germans, for Vilna. It was important point for them.

And as we were going, we came to an old military cemetery. So we stopped there. I said, let's go to the dead bodies now, nobody is going to bother us here. And we went there. And we're sitting quietly next to a grave, I don't know.

And here comes a peasant, and he looks at us, and he says, what are you doing here? So my sister, she was very happy, she says, oh, we are Polish refugees, we are running from [POLISH], and we're looking for our relatives.

He says, don't tell me stories. You are Jewish. But I'm going to help you anyway. You see, at that time, they already knew. He says, but you can't stay here. And he took us home to his cottage there. And there were two children. Put us out somewhere in the attic.

And said, here you stay till the end. And we will bring you food. You don't dare to even to move anything. Because there are Germans all over. And the fighting. And we saw it. They were fighting. And it was--

You were 21 or 22 or 23?

24.

24? Or 23?

No, no, [INAUDIBLE]. It was 1944, I was 23, yes.

23, OK.

And my mother, yeah. And my mother also believed, she says, let's go, we will survive. We went there. And two days were bringing us potatoes and bread and milk. All of a sudden, once, he came, he says, you have to leave. I said, what happened?

They told us all the people should go to the shelters because they are going to bomb us. And we can't take you to the shelter, because you are-- we will all perish because of you. And we understood it. We said, look, we are going away.

We went back to the cemetery. Back to the cemetery. And we sit there like three mice. And here a man comes, and he says, what are you doing here? You are Jewish women. You are going to be killed, bombed. And I said, I don't care, for Russian planes. Let them go as much as they want. Let me be killed here, not from the hands of the Nazis.

And he says, you know something, I'm going to dig a hole under the-- next to the grave. And I'll put you in the hole. And I'll put on top-- I will put some leaves, you know this. And nobody will know you're alive. I just leave a room for

you to be able to breathe. And don't ever-- I will come every night at this time, I will bring you some milk and bread. And don't even move till I won't come. He was a firefighter, a very brave man.

Now, this was a Russian?

Polish.

A Polish.

Polish.

Gentile?

Gentile.

He came and two. And then I remember, my mother, they were fighting. So we had these pieces flowing all over, over us. And my mother used to touch our knees. Oh, you have your legs? You have your feet? You have your hands? We'll go through to Eretz Israel. I remember the address. We'll go. She was such an optimist, I'm telling you.

And then once, I put my ear to the earth, and I heard the Russian tanks. I said Ma, [YIDDISH]. And sure enough, the man came. And he brought us back to the place where we stayed before. And he stayed. And the other one said, still, we are not going to let you go. Because they are still bombing.

And then as soon as we could, we left. And we went to our own apartment. And this woman, true, she didn't have the things. She said well, they took away from her. But the only thing she gave us is that my mother had a hand sewing machine. So she gave this to us. And my mother really started from old shmatas. She made for us clothes and things and did.

And then once I go in the street, and I meet him. With all these years with this. I said, you are alive? He says, obviously I'm alive. You can see me. I said, well, I thought you were-- you were taken.

He says, I was in the partisans. I said, you were in the partisans? How come I never knew about it? He says, if you will know about that, it would be very bad, because nobody knew. My family didn't know. And he started to-- and he says, before the war, we had very different, in different surroundings. But this, we felt such a closeness.

You had something in common.

Yeah. And that's how. This was 1944. In 1947, we got married.

You got married in Vilna?

In Vilna.

And you stayed?

Pardon me?

You stayed there?

And where we got married, there's also a story. First of all, as soon as Vilna was liberated, my friend who was also a partisan and who was one grade below me, and I told you, they belonged to the Communist Youth, she came to see. She says, we're going back to school. Because she's also going to school, biology. I said, I have my book. I have my whole year of biology. She says, I have, too.

We went there, we were the first students to register. The war was still going on, September '44. And there were five or six Lithuanian girls with us. And we started school.

Then was another story, you see. She knew that I belonged to a Zionist organization, and this was treif. But she was in the committee of the people who approved the students and who even give stipends. And she took upon her-- she's still alive. She's in Vilna, you can see her. And she took upon herself, she said a lie to the committee that I never belonged to any organizations. And this was really good.

So you got a stipend?

I got a stipend. And I was already. But I started school. And after a couple of years, I got a very good job. And I decided I don't need school anymore. I had three years of biology. Who needs it? I got a good salary and I don't want to go to school anymore. I'm sick of school. But then we got married.

My husband said, look, my life was such that I didn't have a chance to go and go to the study, go to university. You had a chance. You are not going to stop. You are going to get your degree. I said no. N-O. And he said, yes. And he said, yes.

And I remember after we got married, 1947, we got a cottage outside. A friend of mine had before the war a cottage there in a place outside on the river. And she gave me room there on our honeymoon. So we were there.

And he put out a little table. And he brought all my books. And he says, here are your books. I have to go to make a living. And you study. You have to make up the time that you lost. Because I don't want you to finish later than Lala. Lala was my friend. And I was crying. I said, that's what I got married for? To sit and study? That's my honeymoon? I was crying, really crying.

But I was sitting and studying. And I made up the time I lost, and I really graduated together in 1949 together with my friend. So everything is nice and rosy, right? But it wasn't.

Because after I graduated, I was recommended by my professor. You see, at that time, we had finished university, we automatically got a master's degree because we defended a thesis. And I was working in phytopathology. It was sickness of plants, and I was working with the fungus. So I had to plant the fungus of sugar beets, how it affects the sugar crop.

And I had to plant in the botanical garden the plants. And then infected with the fungus. And then take the crop. And it was about a three months' work. And he helped me. He used to come with me. And I had to cover the plants with gauze, you know, whole business.

And I got a very good dissertation. And my professor decided I should pursue and go, too, for a doctoral. And he recommended me. He said, you have to get into the-- take the entrance exam, he says, it's by the Academy of Sciences. And you will definitely be accepted, because there's no one better than you. The other girls, they hardly graduated. Except this friend of mine, Lala, who was also very good.

Anyway, but, he says to me-- one thing was, he was a Lithuanian, a very, very knowledgeable man. But he wasn't a communist. And he says to me, you have to work very hard on your Marxism-Leninism, because I know you will pass the biology part. But this, you have to work. I said, don't worry. I'll be like an A student. And I start working.

A day before the exam, I get a letter from the president of the Academy of Sciences. He does not allow me to take the exam. The exam for the graduate entrance. No why, no what, nothing. It's not allowed. I think have the letter still in Lithuanian.

I was so upset, I went to my professor. I said, what happened? He says, you're asking me. That's the communist regime, you're not a member of the party. You never were a member of the party. And plus, you are Jewish. That's two things which don't go good.

And I was so upset at that time. I said, if we didn't leave before when everybody was leaving in 1945-46, first of all, we were waiting for my brother-in-law had some kind of a job that he did.

My husband didn't feel this way, but I personally felt that I owe something the Soviets. They saved our lives. Because of them, we're alive. Why should we not be loyal to them? Look, I'm going to school here, and I had everything. Why should I go somewhere?

Was this in '49? This is not, this is in '49, yeah. 1949.

'49, nice, right.

Exactly when I graduated. Started already a little with Jewish writers. Things like this.

Jewish doctors.

Yes. The doctors was later.

That was '35.

That was '52. The doctors plot.

So I remember it very well.

There's something else in 1935. OK.

Because I was connected with it. And I said, why didn't we leave? Is that's why we stayed here? Now, I'm even barred from-- they could have so easily failed me on the Marxism-Leninism. But this is just a slap in my face, not to let me take the exam. That was awful.

And my friend Lala was accepted, because she was a communist. And she told me right away, she says, look, you are not a member of the party and you are Jewish. What do you want? The Lithuanian girls who hardly passed, they were all accepted.

And then I went, started looking for a job, a teaching job. And guess what they gave me? An evening school all the way somewhere out of the city because nobody wanted it. So I got the job as a teacher in this school, evening school. And this is besides the point.

I was a biology teacher. And I was giving once a lecture about Darwinism evolution theory. The rule was such we had to submit. Every time before we went to class, you had to submit exact--

Lesson plans?

Lecture notes.

--the plan what we're going to talk about. Our principal was supposedly historian. In my opinion, was not, and she just was a communist and she knew the party history. She came once. And she was, by the way, she was very fond of me.

She came once to inspect, to my lecture. And [INAUDIBLE], it was a couple of questions from the students. I answered. And I was very careful always not to-- at that time was Lysenko was the god. So I was trying always to put his name in front of everything, whatever I was talking.

And after that class, she comes to me, she says, you know something, I want to see you in my office. I thought she's going to praise me. She says, you know, I'm very unhappy with you. I said, why? She says, I made notes, and you said a few words which are not in the textbook. I look at her, I said, not in the textbook? What you expect me to? If I have to

talk only from the textbooks, what do they need me for? I'm the teacher here to explain.

She says, no, I don't understand anything about evolution. So I can't accept anything which is not in the textbook. And she said, this is a reprimander. If it is going to happen again, I must tell you, you are not going to work here.

I came home in tears. I said, what is it, a prison? I happened to have bright kids. Because they were working, a few Jewish kids were. And there was very-- and believe me, I was explaining only in the frames of what is allowed. But it wasn't in the textbook, and she was an ignorant. So she made it.

Well, after that, I got a job also during the day in a-- you see, there were a few, one Polish Gymnasium still left in Vilna. And they need textbook for the Polish kids. And I knew perfect Polish, and Russians, Lithuanian, and German. So they gave me a job in a publishing to be an editor of the translated textbooks, biology sciences textbooks. And also I was translating also, making additional money. So this was OK for me.

But this was already in the year 1952. That's what I remember. I had a very friendly relationship with my coworkers. The manager was a Jew. But he was a communist member. [INAUDIBLE] he was such a coward. He was afraid he went to, I don't know. He was afraid to breathe.

So once I came to work, and all of a sudden, nobody talks to me. Of course, I say hello and goodbye and how. And everybody is quiet. I ask a couple questions, they are answering only formally and nothing else.

And one woman. One was a Polish woman, head Polish, one Lithuanian. So I come to her, I said, what's going on here? What did I do? What did I do? She says, didn't you read the paper? I said, what's in the paper? We got to transport of Jaffa oranges from Israel and they are poisoned by the Jews. So that's why nobody nobody's going to talk to you, because you are Jewish.

I says, what? What nonsense is it? She says, don't you know, it was in the paper? I said, I didn't read the paper. If I would read, I would tear it in pieces. You better keep quiet, she says. And don't say a word. That's what they told me.

And then I come home, my husband at that time was already also already working in a publishing of a paper, of a three languages paper. And the editor was a good friend of his and his assistant editor.

And all of a sudden, he says, you know, don't be surprised, we have now papers all the time, these articles about the Jewish-- how do they call them-- Jewish people who have Russian names that are actually all Jews. And they write about them. And they write the Russian names and in the parentheses, their Jewish name. [? Kosmopolits, ?] like we used to call them.

[? Kosmopolits. ?] And they are enemies. They want to sell our country. And he was a Russian, a White Russian. And he believed in it.

Excuse me, Lucy, we have to stop it here.

OK. That's it. You want to talk more? Or maybe you'll stop it altogether.

No, we're not going to stop it altogether.