

Welcome, I'm Joseph Brail, co-director of the Kean College Holocaust Resource Center. Today, Thursday, November 12th, 1992, we are privileged to have with us Mrs. Julia Altholz of South Orange?

Maplewood.

Maplewood. And Mrs. Altholz will be good enough to share with us her story of what happened to her as a little girl in Poland. Mrs. Altholz, perhaps you'll start by telling us where and when you were born.

I was born in 1932 in Lwow, Poland. But I lived in Szerszeniwce, which was a small village where my father had a farm. So although I was born in town, I don't know exactly when, but we went back home, which was Szerszeniwce.

Do we have Szerszeniwce over here?

Well, I put down Lwow, because it is-- well, yes, I don't have. This is Szybowice, where I stayed during the war. But I was actually born in Lwow and lived in Szerszeniwce. It's S-Z-E-R-- can I? I think maybe I should do it. Szerszeniwce. It's C-Z-E-N-I-O with an umlaut.

All right.

It's a very small hamlet.

All right. You have here some wonderful family pictures. Perhaps we'll begin by taking a look at the older of the two pictures.

Yes.

Can you say something about?

Yes. This is my mother's family. And she was a young girl. This is my mother, the younger brother, her younger brother. My maternal grandparents, my grandmother, my grandfather. These are different uncles and aunts. They're all cousins of my mother.

And what happened to them?

Everyone in this picture except my youngest uncle was lost in the Holocaust. They were all killed. None of them were in concentration camp. They actually perished before by shootings and other means of killing people. So there are 14 people in this picture and only two lived through the war. Is that it?

Well, my mother didn't live through the war. She was killed in the war, too. This was, as far as I can tell you, it's only one, my uncle Kuba, who survived. And whom I met after the war.

So one out of the 14?

Yes.

And the other 13 were perished during the Holocaust.

Yes.

In this picture, what do we see?

This is my father's family. And this is my mother and father, my paternal grandmother, my father's two brothers, a cousin. And there am I. Out of this picture, we were luckier there. One, my father survived. His middle brother, his

cousin, and I.

That's how many people?

There were, let's say, four people survived out of this picture.

There are 13 people in the picture and four survived.

Yes. All right. Let's now get back to try to build up your story. When were you born?

In 1932. August 18th.

All right. That means that when the war broke out, you were just passed your seventh birthday.

I was seven, yes.

Do you recall life of the first seven years of your life?

Yes, I recall them quite vividly. And I think that those years made such a positive impact on me that maybe I came out of this horror not totally and completely without hope. And I think it was partly the way I grew up to the point of the war. And also some of the years during the war, where I was lucky.

We lived on a farm which my father owned. It was a big place. We had woods, and river, and cows, and pigs, and horses, and chickens. And I would think that it was an idyllic life for a little girl. I was an only child, probably very spoiled. Had the run of the place. Had good people around me, uncles and aunts, grandparents, and only one grandmother, who lived very close. She had a little tobacco farm and a tobacco store. Lots of kids to play with.

And I remember those years as just absolutely wonderful. I traveled with my parents. I just had a wonderful time. I don't remember any trauma other than once being bitten on my back by a chicken who sat on her eggs. And I came too close to her. And she jumped and I fell. And she sort of nudged me on my back. That was the biggest trauma of my childhood.

And you had just-- had you begun school before the war broke out?

No, not yet. I was supposed to begin school at the age of seven and then the war broke out. So I never actually went to school till after the war. But I don't believe that I was writing, but I think I read. I somehow-- I don't know where. I believe it was my aunt Fanny, who, when she came on vacation, would, I think, try to teach me. And I read a little bit.

So your father, you say, was a--

Farmer.

--a farmer. And your mother?

My mother was my mother and his wife.

And a housewife.

And a housewife. Very much so.

All right. When the war broke out, your part of Poland, what happened to it?

Our part of Poland was invaded by the Russians in 1939. And because my father was a farm owner, or a land owner, he was considered rather dangerous. They tried to take all land owners and confiscate their lands and send the perpetrators,

people who own land, to Siberia.

But it did not happen to us. Because as soon as the Russians invaded, we went back to Lwow. Lwow was a beautiful larger city in Eastern Poland, where we had an apartment. My parents maintained an apartment there throughout the time that we had owned the farm. And we went there in order, according to my father, get lost in the crowd. And indeed, we did.

He left everything, as far as our possessions. And we went to Lwow. And he, very shortly after getting there, decided that he was going to get a job as a bookkeeper. And indeed, he got a job in a hospital as a bookkeeper. And he then rose to the ranks of [POLISH], which means the top bookkeeper.

There was an anecdote. I'm not sure that it was true. But members of our family kept saying that he went to the hospital and told the people that he's always worked for a big landowner. And he worked very hard. And he would show the people his varicose veins. That he worked so hard, and that now he deserves a good job.

I'm not sure that the story is true. But that's certainly the legend in our family. And we stayed. I went there for the first time to school, for a short time, to a Russian school. I didn't know the Russian alphabet. I mean, I've never-- it was very foreign. But for a few months. And I don't really remember much of that time. I do remember not liking it, because I didn't understand anybody.

But I did learn the Russian alphabet that time, which helped me years and years later when I went to the Soviet Union with our family and I still could read some of the alphabet.

The story of the war in Poland is two parts. One, '39, when Poland was divided between Russia and Poland.

Right, for me.

And June '41, when the Russians-- when the Germans--

Hitler, yes.

--invaded and went on to Russia. Can you describe what happened to you and your family at this time?

As I said, we lived in our apartment. And I don't remember many specific times that I had something extraordinary happen. I went to school. As I said, I didn't like it very much. And I understand my mother kept me out of school if I became very distraught about it. But generally, there was no-- I mean, it was OK.

But then as soon as Hitler invaded, it was days when my father came home one day. We lived in a town, in Lwow, in a fairly non-Jewish area. It was Krupiarzka, which was a town-- a street that not that many Jews lived there. So in that respect, we were lucky.

Because apparently, the Akcjas, as they were called, where they would keep taking Jews out and shooting them, or taking them on lorries and taking them. At that time, we certainly didn't know where they were taking them. This did not happen so much in our little neighborhood because there were not that many Jews.

But my father came home from work and told me, told us, that there are these terrible things happening. People are being shot in the streets. All lawyers, doctors, professors who are Jewish are being taken and either shot right there on the spot or taken away. And he thought that this was the time to go back to Szerszenowce, to go back to our home. Because after all, this was our home.

And indeed, after listening to a few of these very unfortunate occurrences, he decided that we should go back home. Home was Szerszenowce.

I must tell you, I don't know the reason for it, I don't remember that time. I don't remember. I remember Lwow, or

Lemberg, as it was called in German. But I don't remember that short period of time when we went back to Szerszeniowce.

What I do remember is coming back to Jezierzany, which was a very small town where my maternal grandparents lived. At that time, it was only my grandmother, because my grandfather had died of natural causes some years before. And we stayed with my grandmother on my mother's side in her home for a short while.

And the first biggest trauma of my life happened when one day, my parents were away. And my grandmother and I were at home. I loved washing her hair. And so since there were no toys and no, for some reason, nothing else for me to do, I washed her hair about four times a day.

And I was washing her hair, when suddenly, there were screams and yells. And I remember my grandmother drying her hair and grabbing me. Well, apparently there was an Akcja, which was that they were hunting Jews. That's the only way I could explain it. And she grabbed me by my hand. I wasn't fully dressed, and I don't know why.

The screams came from outside.

Outside. The screams came from outside. She apparently knew what they signified because she grabbed me. And as I say, I wasn't fully dressed. It seemed to be that I was maybe in a nightgown. And she ran with me through the streets.

In Poland, very often, there were basements or cellars that were not inside the house. But there was the house and the entrance, and next to the house, there was a door, a trap door, in the pavement. You opened the trap door, you went down the stairs, and that's where the cellar was.

And at one such point, she threw open one of those doors and practically pushed me down the stairs and said, hide. Go there, go there. And I don't remember exactly the words. And she ran away.

And I stayed in that cellar for a while. I don't know for how long. And I don't know how I came to get out of that cellar. But I guess maybe what happened was I finally got out of the cellar. And I don't know how I got back to my grandmother's house. I really don't remember that. Or try not. Maybe I'm blocking it. I'm not sure.

My grandmother was shot in that raid. Apparently what happened, they were just going from house to house, pulling Jews. Unlike the way we lived in Lwow, in Lemberg, that was totally non-Jewish area, my grandmother in her place lived in a more Jewish area. And apparently, she was trying not to be caught with me because I guess she felt it was too dangerous. So she was trying to go and hide elsewhere. And she was shot.

And when I finally got home-- and I don't exactly remember how that happened, whether I did it by myself. I could have. I knew the town. Or somebody took me. After that Akcja, as they called it, the raid on Jews, very quickly, my parents decided that something very drastic has to be done.

After the war, I was told, that this happened several times, that they were just arbitrarily hunting Jews. I think this is when the thought occurred to my parents that, in order to save me, they need to give me away to a family, a Christian family.

Because after the war, when I questioned my parents how this was born in their minds, they said, after this Akcja, after the time that totally out of nowhere, this hunt began and people were killed, including my grandmother, they decided.

Where were your parents when your grandmother was with you, or you were with your grandmother?

We were all living together. But my parents went either to visit someone or do something. They left the house.

Yeah.

When this particular Akcja occurred, where they were, they were apparently visiting some friends making plans. What it

is that they might want to do. Because it was quite apparent that being Jewish in Poland at that time was not a good thing to be. And that was just in the very beginning of all of the trouble. But where they were, they were more in a Christian area.

Right.

And not in the sort of ghetto type of area, because many Jews lived. They went to visit some Christian friends, probably to talk about maybe some way of saving themselves. And they didn't know about the Akcja, as they used to call. They used to call these raids Akcja.

Did you ever understand why your grandmother pushed you down into the cellar and didn't join you?

I understood it because I questioned it. And to save one small child, I was given to understand early in my life that it was a lucky break that I didn't look Jewish. That is, I didn't have a nose that was supposed to be Jewish. That was a very prevalent part of being Jewish, apparently, in Poland, at least, that you had a Jewish nose. And I wasn't very dark. And I was the lucky one who didn't look Jewish. So these looks meant something, apparently.

And they felt that since I didn't look Jewish, being with a person who looked Jewish, my grandmother was dark-haired and dark eyes, a nose that wasn't perfectly straight. All of this was told to me, of course, after the war. I didn't realize that there was a Jewish look till it was made clear to me.

So she thought that a small child by herself is more likely to be safe than someone with a fairly Jewish-looking elderly woman. And so that's why she pushed me down those stairs in order to separate herself from me and still to keep me safe.

I'm going to ask you to write down the name of the town where your grandmother lived. Jezierzany. Oh, my goodness. Jezierzany.

All right.

This is the time when the Germans had already come.

Oh, yes, absolutely.

And what happened to your family after that event? After these Akcijas and your parents were looking for some kind of solution.

What my parents decided-- and of course, all of that was told to me slightly later. That the only way to try to survive is to save the child. This is how I was known, the child. And then when the child is saved, or put into a place that seems to be safe, that they would try and survive this horror.

And so they decided to give me away to a Christian family. Because they've heard before that children were, when caught, were put much quicker into the gas chambers or being shot. Because children are of no use. They certainly couldn't work. So they wanted to save the child. And they did find, through a grapevine, a person, whom I learned to love and respect. And I called him [POLISH], which means grandpa.

And this was Mr. Surowiec, a man who had a very unusual family. He had two nieces, whom he tried to bring up as his own children. And then I came on the scene.

And my parents decided that the only way to do is to try to save me. And they did. They found a person. It's a very long and tedious story, so I don't think it's possible for me to go into it. But they did find a person who, without seeing me, knowing us at all personally, just knowing that there is this Jewish child who needs protection.

What they did need is a picture of me. Because again, I apparently didn't look Jewish. That is, I didn't have whatever

looks Jewish, that is dark eyes. I mean, it's really very hard for me to even talk about it, the prototype of looking Jewish.

But apparently, I didn't look Jewish. I didn't have a long nose. I wasn't dark. And so lucky me, I could pass as a non-Jew. And those were the only prerequisites that these people had. They said, we hate to say this to you, but the safety of the child depends on for her not looking typically Jewish, meaning having dark eyes, having slightly less than a perfect nose, dark hair. I mean, just talking about it makes me uncomfortable.

Do you recall friends of yours-- little, young friends of yours from the farm or in this town?

Yes, I recall them from the farm. They were all children of people who were farmers and worked with my father. And they were-- I loved them all. They were kids. We were all children. Whether we were lucky enough, or whether I was lucky enough never to know that there was something wrong with me, that suddenly there was so much wrong with me when Hitler came that I had to be hidden and all of that. As a child, I was just one of the kids.

What was the population of the--

On our farm?

--community where your farm was located?

There really was not a community. There was a lot of land. My father owned most of it. And there were people, farmers and experts in different fields. One knew a lot about tobacco. One knew a lot about horses. The other one knew about sheep and ducks. And these were people who lived in the village. Mostly very close to the farm. Some of them had small farms of their own, some worked with my father.

But these were not Jewish people?

None of them were Jewish.

You were the only family.

No, we were the only family. And my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, who used to own a tobacco store. She grew tobacco then sold it. There were some other relatives in other, smaller villages around. I only remember, you know, wonderful things about that farm. A child on a farm. I couldn't imagine a better life.

Now, when you came to-- how do I say, Jezierzany?

Jezierzany, Jezierzany. That was my grand.

That was after Lwow.

Yes.

Lwow became uninhabitable for your family.

Or any Jews.

And your parents decided to leave.

Right, right.

And came to the grandmother.

To Jezierzany, to grandmother. We stayed there for a very short, yes.

The maternal grandmother. And did you have friends there?

I don't remember if I did. I don't think so.

You weren't there very long?

No, I wasn't there very long. Again, I don't really-- being a child, it's hard to know time. I know that I wasn't there very long. It was a short time.

All right. Then when you were given over for hiding with this Christian family, what town was that?

That was in Szepowce. And I think I--

We have that.

Yes. That was a small village. And there, there were no Jews at that time that were living as normal human beings, obviously. They were either in camps somewhere. There was a small working camp not too far from there where they had Jews. There was like an-- it wasn't a concentration camp. It was a work camp.

A labor camp.

A labor camp, a small labor camp.

What large town was near? It was Jezierzany, it was there.

They were all near each other.

They were all near each other. And the reason why I was given away to these people, it was not only because that was the person who was willing and able to take me, but it was the proximity of places my parents knew, I guess. They felt a little more secure in giving me away to people who are not in a very different area.

Now, your parents managed to find somebody who would take you in.

Yes.

It would help, since you mentioned his name, and he's obviously a wonderful human being, if you just put down the name of the gentleman who saved you.

Yes. His name was Andrzej, Andrew, Surowiec.

Did you understand why did he take you in?

My parents told me. As a matter of fact, I often tell this to my children. I was, I guess, not quite eight. Or maybe I was. I must have been eight by then, when my father and mother sat me down.

And first of all, the biggest shock of my life was when my mother told me from now on, I have to wash my own hair. I had very, very long hair in long braids. And that was a trauma. I mean, it's a childish trauma. But was a trauma to be able to manage it. So I was very suspicious that all of a sudden, I had to do this. But they wanted me to be as self-sufficient as possible.

Another thing that my mother said, which I admired so much when I became a mother of a child, of a daughter. I have a son and a daughter. But when my daughter was born, I was really-- it came back to me. My mother told me all about being a female, being a woman, at age eight. All the things that I needed to know. Because she felt that there were some

things I needed to know in order to protect myself.

And they told me all of these things within about four evenings. They were telling me how to take care of myself. I had to wash my own hair. And all other things. Because they told me that they are going to let me stay with some very, very nice people for a short time because times are bad. And I guess in the way that they could find to explain to me the bad times without actually frightening me more than I was already frightened.

And they told me that I will be living with a family who will take care of me, who are very nice, who are very sweet people. Just for a little time. And then that my parents will come and get me again when the bad people will leave, and war will stop. And what I remember is that I didn't understand much what they were saying. And they said--

But you were going to leave them.

But I was going to leave them. And I did. But I think the one thing that helped me, that I wasn't totally traumatized, was that they made it a big deal. Because I arrived on the little farm at Mr. and Mrs.-- not Mrs., but Mr. Surowiec, during the day.

So there was little play acting. And people picked me up. And I was supposed to be a child of a niece of Mr. Surowiec who was living in a different part of Poland.

Who delivered you?

A man who did not know that I was Jewish. A man delivered me. He came in sort of a buggy, horse and buggy. Apparently, being told a story that a niece who had some very, very hard times in Pomorze, which was another part of Poland. She was apparently an unwed mother. And that she was not able to care of me. And that I was being sent to this family, to this new family, Mr. Surowiec.

And the man who picked me up thought that, indeed, I was this non-Jewish child. Because he did not pick me up at my grandmother's where my parents were. But he picked me up kind of halfway on the street somewhere. That was arranged with Mr. Surowiec.

And you were on the street alone at that time?

I was alone knowing the story.

Where were your belongings?

I had very little belongings. I had a small suitcase and a big teddy bear. A brown teddy bear and a little suitcase. And I was told-- and what I meant to tell you before. That as a child, some things become intriguing. And I think in my misery, there was this intriguing story going on.

Because my parents said, this is like a little play, this is like a little story that's going on. And I was apparently sufficiently involved in the mystery of this that that was not the hardest part. The hardest part was after, when I realized what had happened.

But as I was in the process of this transportation from one place to another, I think I was intrigued by all of this. And this man who took me to my new home did not know that I was a Jewish child. The only people who knew was, of course, the family and the priest.

And why was he so-- I understand why he was so like--

Why was he selected? Because wanted to take me.

No, from his point of view. From your parents' point of view, obviously, he was selected for your safety. From his point



of view, why was he selected to pick up this little girl on the street?

Not on the street. He was selected to pick up the child, who was almost like an orphan, whose mother was in Pomorze, and she came.

Who was all alone and who was all alone and who was a niece.

But how did she land up over there, wherever it was, all alone in this town?

Because apparently, the story was-- that the niece, there was such a person. There was a real niece in Pomorze, of Mr. Surowiec. That the niece was able to get me as far as this town by other means.

Oh, this was out of town.

No, it was sort of in town. That they were able to get me from one place to another. And that would he kindly pick me up at such and such a place. People had to go to work, so they're just leaving me there. There was someone, apparently.

As you look back on it, do you understand it?

No, completely unbelievable.

I can't understand. If they're in town, there was a small town.

It was a small town.

If you could go to this location--

Yes.

--you could go to the house already.

No. The house was further away. I was still in Jezierzany when I was picked up.

Ah, then your grandmother's town.

Oh, yes, that was my grandmother's--

Ah, I see, I see.

--town. And I went to Szepowce.

Oh, now I understand.

No, no, no, I was in the town. Except no one was there to put me on that--

Yeah.

--little wagon.

So they managed to get a Pole who didn't know anything about it.

He didn't know anything about it. But he did know, apparently--

Who was going to bring you over to Mr.--

Surowiec.

Surowiec.

Yes. And he did bring me over to Mr. Surowiec. And it was during the day.

So while all this drama was going on, you were playing your role.

I was playing my role.

And then it hit you that you were in a strange house with strange people.

It hit me, yes. Then it hit me.

And your parents weren't there.

Right. But my parents did prepare me for it in many different ways. But the thing that was-- a child, I suppose, hangs on or latches on to something that seems to be comforting at the time. And this little story sort of intrigued me, I guess.

But I must tell you, this is why I really loved that family. Is that it didn't last long. Mr. Surowiec and his nieces, that was the family. They were, I think, extraordinary people who loved this child. And they let me know it.

So although I was different bad dreams and things like that. But for the most part, they did, in some way, show me a warmth and love. And it was genuine. It was genuine from Mr. Surowiec. That I know. And the nieces, maybe it wasn't quite as genuine. But they wanted to please their uncle. And I was a little girl. So they were good to me, too.

You talk about Mr. Surowiec and the nieces. Is there a Mrs. Surowiec anywhere?

No, she died. She died before I came onto the scene. The reason why this family was an odd family is that Mr. Surowiec lost his wife very early, when he was a young man. And he was probably-- I know he was an extraordinary human being.

He took in those two nieces of his who lost their parents. They were sisters, the two nieces. And he took care of them. He became their father, mother, their family. And then he took another little child in. And it was very difficult for him to give me up.

Did you ever speak to him after the war?

Oh, sure.

How long did he live after the war?

He lived quite a long time after the war. I corresponded with him. And then, of course, when we left Poland and then went to Germany, I spoke to him from Germany. But once we lived in America, he had died by then. In '53. Sort of, he semi-adopted you. And loved you as a child, as though--

He loved me--

--you were his.

Unconditionally, yes. He was a very extraordinary human being.

There was no financial reward for him.

There was financial reward in the way-- by the time my father gave me to him, there was no financial rewards, not that many. Because we had gone through the Russians. Where there was some financial.

He did not do it for the sake of finances.

No, he did not.

He did it for a love of a young, helpless child.

First of all, he did it because, I believe, that he was a true human being. He was Christian. I guess he was a true Christian. He was a man who believed in God. And he was the man who believed in the goodness of people.

So when he took me, he didn't love me, he didn't know me. And he did it first because he thought it was the right thing to do. He did protect himself as much as he could, the way I looked. They needed pictures. Because I mean, he didn't want to endanger me or himself. He endangered himself plenty.

But he was just an extraordinary human being, who had some financial arrangements. Some. By that time, my father didn't have anything to give him. But he was just an extraordinary human being.

And you were with him, then, from-- when do you figure that you joined him?

I think it was '41.

In '41. Shortly after the Russian-German war broke out.

Shortly, right. And then I was to the very end, '45.

Till the very end. And actually, the end over there must have been before '45.

Probably the end of '44, beginning of '45. I'm not quite sure.

So it was three, three and a half years we're talking about. About three and a half years, I figure, yes.

In those three and a half years, did you ever experience any unusual experiences because of the situation?

Yes. I experienced several of them when they got afraid that somebody might recognize me as a Jewish child. They were extremely thankful that my Polish was pure Polish. I never spoke Yiddish or any other language. I only spoke Polish. So there was no-- because there were a lot of people who really wanted to save children, but they had either had heavy accents or didn't speak Polish. So some of them couldn't be saved even if they would try.

So that was helpful to the family that I didn't scream out that I was a Jewish child. Neither with my looks nor with the language.

But they were very careful. I mean, I was free. I was walking around. I went to church three times a day. So that in itself took all my day up. I went early morning to services, then at 12 o'clock, then to vespers. And we had instructions in the meantime.

Because I did not go to school. They decided that it wasn't the best for me to go to public school. And the thing, the fact was that in that little hamlet, many girls didn't go to school. They went to church school, as we called it.

And we were learning how to read a little bit, how to write, mostly religion. Some, we were drawing pictures, we talked about the sky. I mean, it was certainly not a high quality education. But they talked about things that they felt were appropriate for little girls.

And no one knew that I was Jewish, except the priest. The reason why the priest knew is that apparently there was a pact between Mr. Surowiec and my parents that if-- and I admired my parents for it, and I will continue to admire them for it.

They said they felt, although they were Jews, obviously, Judaism was very important. But to them, the love for their child was more important. It was above everything. And they felt that after the war, if no one remains from our immediate families, rather than being a Jewish orphan, they would have preferred for me to be a loved, beloved Christian child that would have family.

It took me many years to understand it. I understood it only when I had my own children. My parents's love for their child was more than the love for their religion, their background. And every person has to do their own thinking about it. I'm not saying they were right or wrong. I'm saying they were my parents.

And so there was a pact. It wasn't written, there wasn't anything in writing. And then two men, my father to Mr. Surowiec, that if no one claims me, if after the war, there is no one in the family, they did not want me to be a Jewish orphan. They wanted me to be whatever I was, but have a family. And of course, I did not understand until I had children of my own.

Fascinating.

And I do feel the same way. And so this man, slowly, I know and I believe that he tried and prayed to God that someone of my family would be saved. But after having done that, he very slowly prepared for me not only becoming a Christian for the world.

I mean, it was a sham at first. You know, I went to church because every little Polish girl went to church. But I think that deep down, very slowly, they were interested that I learn about the Christian religion.

What happened to your parents during those three and a half years?

As soon as my parents gave me for safekeeping, they had made a decision. My mother didn't survive the war, but my father did. And my father told me they made a decision not to be caught in a camp. Because that's not what they wanted to do. They wanted to try and survive by hiding.

They had many, many Christian friends. That's because we had a farm and father knew many farmers. And they were all Christians. There weren't that many Jewish farmers. And they actually went from one hiding place to another. And they were surviving underground.

In Poland, potatoes were kept in the ground. They would dig holes dug, straw put in the hole, potatoes on top of the straw, another layer of straw to keep the potatoes for the winter. And my parents, for a very long time, lived in these underground holes where the potatoes were kept. And they were--

Do you have any idea how long that was?

Off and on for the most part of the war. Off and on. Except after my mother was killed, then my father was in the woods. Sometimes with the partisans, sometimes hiding, sometimes hiding back in a hole, sometimes in the woods. He was never captured. He lived in the woods.

He kept on changing, though.

He kept on changing. He kept on running. One of his brothers was killed. The other brother survived with him for a while in these different hiding places. Then they split. But they always ran, from place to where.

How did your mother perish?

My mother perished because right after I was given away to safety, they began their hiding life. And they found a peasant farmer who was very kind. And he said look, I cannot really keep you on my land. But there is a no man's land. I will keep you there. He dug a hole. He got permission to keep his potatoes. He made many holes to keep his potatoes. And one of them, my parents were.

And only during the night did they go and they eat. They ate at night. And they, of course, they were human beings, they had some human functions. They did that at night. And he kept them safe.

But other people in the area were very suspicious. And he one day told-- one night told my father that you must find a different hiding place for a little bit. Because they're going to come and search my fields or search my house, search where the horses were kept. And keep a hiding place. Find a hiding place for a few days and then come back.

So my father left my mother in the hiding place, and at night, traveled to some other peasants and farmers that he knew. He did find a man who said he could keep him a week. But he had to wait for the night. You couldn't travel during the day.

So he waited at this new hiding place. And when he went back for my mother, she was gone. Because during that day, when my father was away-- she was there, by the way, there were more than one. There was a cousin, a distant cousin, with them that was hiding. These two women were discovered and shot. And they left them there.

So your father's survival, despite all those terrific efforts, impressive efforts, at hiding in different places and so on. His survival was accidental.

Totally accidental. I don't like to say it's b'shert. I don't like that-- I have some trouble with my own God at this point. The choosing. But nevertheless, I was lucky. I have a father, had a father.

But this we hear very often when we talk with survivors.

Right.

That in some cases, the miracles were daily.

Yes, it was-- oh, absolutely, they were daily.

In your father's case, because of his connections and business with--

Well, they're all farmers.

--so many non-Jewish people.

Mostly, it was no farmers. And my father was an extraordinary human being. And he had many friends, Jews, non-Jews. He was just a special guy, I think. I know that he was. And so he, somehow, that's how. It was b'shert, as we say.

At the time of liberation, you were with Mr. Surowiec.

Yes. And your father was in hiding.

My father and his brother were hiding. Sometimes together, sometimes separate.

But not far away.

Not too far away, not too far away.

What happened at that point?

At that point after the war, the first thing my father and my uncle did, of course, were came to the Mr. Surowiec. And there was one other time that my father actually was on the property. That is when he probably lost his mind when my mother was killed.

And he simply walked I don't know for how many days and found himself in the backyard of our house. But apparently, realized what he was doing, and just bypassed the house during the day. Which, of course, endangered him enormously. But I guess it just was too much for him to discover what had happened to my mother.

But in any event, after the war, my uncle and my father came. And I must tell you that we had moved a few times, the Surowiecs and I, because of the bombing and the shelling. So we had gone to different little villages during the big fights that were going on, you know, when Hitler was retreating.

But we were back in our place when my father arrived. And for a while, we lived together. Not in the same hut. They were sort of across the street. Because Mr. Surowiec told my father, there is no one left. We had this child in common. And he wanted them to all-- that we should all live together. And for a few months, we did. Because my father didn't have the heart. He just couldn't make a clean break.

So how long did that last?

I think a few months.

A few months. Then what happened? So where are we? Are we in 1944 or '45 at this point?

We are probably in the beginning of '45. Again, I'm not very clear.

The war is coming to an end. Your father is deciding that he wants to leave the area.

Yes, he's decided he wants to leave the area. He wants to make a life.

And what happened to you then?

And I did say goodbye to the two nieces of Mr. Surowiec, these cousins of mine, if you will. But I never could say goodbye to him. Because when he knew that my father had made the decision, he locked himself upstairs in one of those attic places where we kept.

This was very dramatic and emotional.

It was very dramatic and emotional.

And I had a letter that I had brought with me, as a matter of fact, that I had written to them when I was already back in Lwow. We went back to Lwow, to Lemberg. That is the place where war found us the first time when the Russians invaded our place, a little farm area. We went to our apartment in Lwow. And we went back there after the war.

We went back to the apartment. Not to our apartment, but to another apartment in the same building, as a matter of fact. And again, with the Russians. This time, the Russians were liberators, not invaders the way they were in 1939. This time, we loved the Russians. And as a matter of fact, that love persisted through all our troubles, our own troubles in America. With the Russians, to this day, I have a very, very warm spot for the Russian people.

And we went back to Lwow. And we stayed there for a while. My father, my uncle, the one that survived. Then we found other cousins. Third cousins. Everybody who was never even thought as family became close family, obviously.

And we made a new family. That was my father, my father's brother, a very, very distant cousin, and his sister, and a very distant cousin boy. A son who also survived like I did-- of course, we didn't know that-- on our Aryan papers. And

we made this family. We lived in a two-room apartment.

In Lwow.

In Lwow. In the same building that we--

How long did you remain there? We remained probably under a year.

And then?

And then we all decided, that is, the adults decided that they want to emigrate either to Israel or to the United States. And we began this journey. We had to go to another part of Poland, which was Wroclaw, which was under the German occupation. And then became German and then Polish again.

And then at this point after the war, it was Polish again. And then we went to several DP camps. And in those DP camps, Displaced Persons camp, one was in Bensheim, which was already in Germany. Because we went from Poland to Germany on our quest to go either to Israel or to America.

My father by then had remarried a wonderful woman, who truly-- and I cannot say that she was my real mother, because she wasn't. But she was the closest thing to a mother. She really was a wonderful woman, whom I loved very much. And she and he decided that they will not emigrate to Israel, that they will not emigrate to the United States.

They felt subhuman. They felt that they were not human, that they were robbed of everything that made them human. And they decided to stay in Germany, of all places. And I questioned them. And they told me the reason why they couldn't stay in Poland.

The morality was-- they said that they couldn't be immoral in Poland. Because although Poland proved to be the most immoral place for them, but this was the beginning. This is when they were children, where they learned what an upstanding human being is.

They couldn't do it in Poland. They could do anything and everything in Germany, because at that time, they didn't consider Germany as worthy of any moral behavior. And my father became a black marketeer. And he couldn't become that in Poland. In spite of the fact, what had happened to him in Poland, he couldn't do it. But in Germany, he became a black marketeer.

How long were you in Germany?

Many years. We were in Germany from 1946 to '52, when we emigrated to the United States. You came at '52.

Yes.

At this point, you're 20 years old.

I'm 20 years old. My parents educated both me and my brother, my brother who came into the marriage through my stepmother.

Through his mother.

They both recuperated to the extent that one can recuperate after the trauma.

But you came here at age 20 and immediately went into Hunter College?

Hunter College with two years credit.

How did you do it?

Well, the reason for it was that when I was in--

Germany.

--in Germany, we learned English in school. We learned French and English. But my parents early on decided that they probably will go to the United States. Although my father had gone to Israel, trying to emigrate. But he did not.

And I had English lessons in addition to being taught English in school and American history. And with all the [GERMAN], which is when you finish high school, had sufficient credits, especially in foreign languages, in history and art history, where, when I went to Hunter, I went in as a freshman. But within four months, they had given me credit for two years. Because I had-- except American history. I had to have American history regents.

You came and lived in New York City.

Yes, we lived in the Bronx on the Grand Concourse for a while. Then I got married a year-- I was a year in Hunter when I got married. And we moved to Jackson Heights, my husband and I.

That would be in '53. And you moved to Jackson Heights. And you had two children.

And I have two children.

First a girl and a boy.

No, first a boy.

First a boy and then a girl. What are they doing today?

Eric is an attorney and Jessica is an arts editor for the MoMA.

For whom?

For Museum of Modern History-- Art, I'm sorry.

For the Museum of Modern Art. Sounds very fascinating.

MoMA, right.

And what did your husband do?

My husband is a builder. As many newcomers to this country became. But his profession really is-- he's a commercial photographer. He had become a builder when he thought that he could do better.

When did you move to New Jersey and why?

Only for the schools. We lived in New York, in Jackson Heights. Then we wanted to move to Manhattan. And we would have to send our children to private schools even then. And then my father made my husband an offer that he couldn't refuse.

And my father was a builder, became a builder in New Jersey. And he offered to you know, take his son-in-law in who was very-- not very much for it, because he was a photographer all these years. But he then decided to do this. And we moved to New Jersey because of his new interest that he might go into business.



I have a few questions that I'd like to ask you. And I see that the tape is running out.

OK.

So we'll wait a while until the new tape is put in. And we'll continue with the questions.

OK, OK.