

[0:00:00]

Translator: So, here we are at The Branch Office of Jehovah's Witnesses. Today is Aug, 1 1995. We are going to listen to the interview with Mrs. Anna Ludwika Mielczarek, who survived persecution of three of German Concentration Camps: Mauthausen, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück.

Robert Buckley: Ok. Would you please tell us your name, your age and where you were born.

Translator: Could you tell us about yourself? What is your name, where and when were you born, and how old are you?

Anna Mielczarek: I don't need to say 'one, two, three 'anymore?

[Background voice] : No. My name is...

[Anna Mielczarek]: My name is Anna Mielczarek. Anna Ludwika Mielczarek, née Kuzmin, born in Schodnica on the 3rd [of April], 12.

[Background voice]: 3rd of April.

Anna Mielczarek: On the third. Twelfth [year] third [of April]. It is the twelfth month, third month, third twelfth. The third.

[Background voice]: On the 3rd of April, 1912.

Anna Mielczarek: Yes. On the 3rd of April, 1912. In Schodnica. I didn't live there for a long time , because [they] took me for upbringing... My parents passed away. I was taken for upbringing by my aunt and uncle. I was... well, I had already finished primary school. So, as I was finishing school, I learned the truth. At that time, brothers came to Boryslaw. One brother from the Branch, brother Ludwik Kinicki. And there they were distributing invitations to Bible talks. And because at that time there was a PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and priests had some influence, so mostly the talks were in the house of PPS. And there we went to see what it looks like for the first time ... I went with one friend from school. We entered the hall, and there were brothers, library and books. And they welcomed us. There was a brother Kinicki, brother Kostkiewicz, and others, and sisters, right? And there was a crowd around us. And they

said: "So, what do the young ladies have to say?." And we were still wearing a navy blue uniforms and cornets. So they already knew that these were schoolgirls. And we said so. So here you go, a booklet like this, like this. So I remember that at that time we took two or three small booklets and... because we only had so many pennies. It cost 20 groszy. But we didn't have any more for the Bible. So, we said to each other: "We will save some money up, so we take it on the second time." When we came the second time, brother Kinicki gave us a Bible personally. And he says: "Here you have it, so that..." Because the Bibles came from Brooklyn. It is this Bible. It's my first Bible. It was published in 1924.

Translator: She's speaking about her baptism, how she learned the truth.

Robert Buckley: Maybe we'd like to back up this a little bit. Ask her about the name of her mother and her father, and how many brothers and sisters she had, and she could give us their names.

Translator: Could you tell us first and last names of you parents, father, mother and your siblings and mention them by name?

Anna Mielczarek: Father's name - Dymitr Kuzmin, Mother - Paulina, née Hewryk, and...

[Background voice]: How many siblings did you have?

Anna Mielczarek: And I'm the thirteenth in a row. And just... thirteenth I have learned the truth. Quickly. With my baptism there was a worse case, when I was born. Because there was an Orthodox Church and there was a church.

[Background voice] : Catholic?

Anna Mielczarek : Catholic Church. And my father... the name already suggests, this Dymitr Kuźmin, he was Ukrainian. And finally my godparents asked, because my mother was sick in bed, they said: "So where should we baptize her? In the Orthodox Church or in a Catholic church?" And the father said: "Whatever." And it ended up that they I was baptized in a Catholic church. But it takes such a luck, that I didn't stay in that church for long because, that time in 1924 already... In the autumn of 1923, but I was baptized in 1924. So I left the church, and I am no longer part of a church because I withdrew from the Catholic Church.

[0:05:00]

And I have the proof, but I did not bring it with me today. That's how I learned the truth. And I became a sister. We started... initially there was no house to house work yet, we would just visit acquaintances, we would write invitations. So I immediately started writing invitations, because there was no typewriter available at that time. I attended every Bible meeting at that time, and it was good. It came to the symbol. So I finally set to preach the gospel. Because when we came with this friend (from school) we found out everything from these small booklets about the church, hell, purgatory, the soul. And later... at home, there were lots of images. In Roman frames. These were expensive things. And I said: "A...." And for the first time I was telling... "So where have you been for so long? It's 9 o'clock and you are just coming home." "Well, we went to hear a public talk. Was such and such. And later this brother announced that the Watchtower study will be at brother Jasiński's place, elderly man, was a shoemaker", I said "poor people. And we attended there a talk, because brother from America arrived and he is going to give a public talk after this talk, which was given at hall. And there we were." And finally I said: "These are all idols. Throw all of that away!." For the first time. We were young, so... And stepfather said: "Who are we raising? You go and see what it is" he said. "That is not our child and in addition is telling us such a stories." And he started reading. In three weeks my mother went with me too. She already went with me to the meeting to see how it looks like." So instead of coming at nine o'clock we both came at twelve o'clock.

[Background voice]: At night.

[Anna Mielczarek]: At night. Oh! And father said: "Well, well, well. The young lady went and came back at nine o'clock. But when the young lady went with the old lady, they came back at twelve o'clock." And [we started to] tell father and father took up reading. On the following Sunday we said, that we were going together to the meeting. And my mother said: "We will all go together." And father started to wince a little, because he considered himself a person of trust, and that brother was a poor man, shoemaker so it was a little... but he went with us. He went and it was good decision. And he sat down on the... It was a big... Large apartment, old-fashioned. He sat down there on a bench, and we were sitting like that, waiting for him, for brother Kinicki, because he was supposed to have a talk. Finally brother Kinicki came and he greeted everyone. He

was well-known man, because even in the Yearbook we have the name of brother Kinicki. He was a classy guy, because he used to be a bank director. He was a figure. And his attitude. And my father saw that they had given him fried potatoes and black bitter coffee for dinner. Because there was poverty at that brother's place. And he sat down, and he ate with us this dinner. And father was watching and watching and... He listened to the Bible talk, and that was good. And later I thought: "What is he going to do next? Don't worry. What he will..." He pulls out his wallet. Then I'm thinking: "What will he do?" And I see. "Oh, he pulled out a red one." It was 100 zloty. And he put in the contribution box. And I thought: "See, he did right thing." And from that moment on, he began attending meetings. And he said: "I..." And after the meeting he said to brother Kinicki: "I invite you to my place for dinner tomorrow."

[0:10:00] Well, that's good. So he attended. And later, we continued attending the congregation meetings together. Probably until June. And later, in June there was a convention." There were 59 people. It was a lot for that time. And finally [at the convention] there is going to be a symbol.

[Background voice]: That is, baptism.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Sorry?

[Background voice]: Baptism. Symbol.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes, baptism. And later, my father... I mean stepfather, but I say father. All the same. He raised me, didn't he? And he heard about it, but... And I thought to myself: "Oh, that's good." And I said nothing. But father was clever enough to say to brother Kinicki: "Just tell my daughter not to hurry up to the symbol, because I don't agree on that." And later this brother said to me: "You know what? You are already our sister. We truly consider you as our sister. But your father opposes it. So that you don't go to the symbol. Listen to him." And I did not say a word. Neither yes nor no. Whether I go or I don't go. Nothing. And finally, when this Sunday came, the day of baptism, I was thinking: "All the sisters have prepared." But it used to be different than it is now. It was like this: one set of clothes, another long nightgown. But I thought to myself: "All they have something to wear, but I don't have anything, because my father is opposed. What should I do? And I..." And later,

one thought came to my mind: "After all, you are only so old so you can wear shirt with straps." This was the idea that came to my mind. And I didn't say anything to anyone. Everyone came for the baptism. They all stood there. First, the brothers were baptized, and then the sisters. And I in a jiffy hid behind a bush, took off the dress, and went straight into the water, to Kinicki. And Kinicki put his arm around me and hesitated for a while as my father and mother were standing on the shore. And he didn't know... but it was just a second. And quickly immersed me in the water! After that, he said: "I was thinking about what to do, whom to listen to. But a thought occurred to me, if it came to your hand, then just go for it. Don't let go." As you can see. That's how I was baptized. And then... Later, when I got married... oh, and then we worked in the villages, it was very far to walk. In Ukrainian villages, in German villages. Because in those parts [lived]: Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, Germans. Everything was there.

[Background voice]: They lived there.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. They lived together, went together. And we went to them all at that time.

[Translator]: How far?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Oh, it was far. We went out at three in the morning to be at work at 10 o'clock. It was a hard journey, far away, really old villages. So we were going to work. But it was good and a lot of fun.

[Translator]: Did you ride bicycles, too?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Sorry?

[Translator]: Bicycles?

[Anna Mielczarek]: On foot.

[Translator]: On foot. There were no bicycles.

[Anna Mielczarek]: On foot. Because even a bicycle wouldn't get there.

[Background voice]: It was mountains.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. It was in the mountains. It was good to work there. And no one in the village... because villages were poor, did not have the money, so two eggs were taken in exchange for a small booklet. Because the booklet cost 20 groszy, and the egg cost 10 groszy. So it was two eggs for a small booklet. People were more willing to exchange this way. Then, after finishing our work... as we were walking, we sat down in a forest clearing and we lit a fire. We made a dinner out of these eggs. We had already paid the brothers for the booklets, so everything was in order. And back home. And straight from there we went to the meeting. We were not tired. And so it was for a long time. Later, when I got a regular pioneer card, well then...

[Background voice]: Pioneer, it means...

[Anna Mielczarek]: So...

[Background voice]: So you preached every day.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes, every day there was a preaching. We were working together in the ministry at that time... we walked far, too. I will tell you what happened one time. We went far into the Ukrainian village. And imagine that...

[Background voice]: _ _ _

[Anna Mielczarek]: At that time everyone work alone in field service.

[0:15:00] Imagine that, when we went to this village, at that time we work individually, not in pairs, and everyone had a briefcase full of literature. After some time, after an hour or an hour and a half, I still had nothing. And I thought to myself: "When I come to the house nobody's home", so I thought: "Who do I talk to?." And just on the other side there was an Orthodox Church. There was a lot of people! The courtyard was full, filled with people. So I went to this Orthodox Church, to this courtyard and I distributed all my booklets. To that Orthodox priest on his property. And I felt so satisfied that my briefcase was empty. Brothers came and asked: "Why is your briefcase empty?." I said: "Because I preach in the Orthodox Church. Where do you preach? You have still full briefcases of literature." He said: "You did the smart thing. We found no one at home." Because they all went to the Orthodox Church. And that's the

work we had. In the meantime, there were places where the work was hard because the brothers were persecuted. A few brothers were stoned to death. Unfortunately, the clergy revolted others from the pulpits. They even provoked the police, the militia, the authorities. So the police sometimes... but they had their rights.

[Translator]: Are you talking about the 1930s now?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Sorry?

[Translator]: Are you talking about the 1930s already?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No. It's still about the...

[Background voice]: About the 1920s.

[Anna Mielczarek]: ...when I had attended school. Because later, when I finished elementary school, I went to high school. And then I asked the brothers: "What should I do about religion classes?" Because elementary school was the basis. There, you know, no one interfered. But right now! There was the district education board in Lviv, that made the decisions. And the priests had full control over it. There was no education for people with different beliefs. These were difficult times. So I said: "Okay." Because whenever I asked, brothers advised me. They advised me well. They said: "Don't say anything, just attend the religious education", they said, "and later you will see, the matter will clarify in time." Because they knew one day I will be expelled from school, because there was no school education for dissenters. And so it was. I attended religion classes, sat quietly. The priest did not know anything, who I am. But whenever he asked questions or have lessons, none of the girls knew the answers. They didn't even know who Abraham or Isaac was, or other basic information. Nobody knew. None responded. And one time the priest got angry because of that and I left the classroom for a while and he said: "Listen ladies", that's how he called us, "how come that none of you know anything about religion. Look at Kuzminovna girl. She has an answer for everything." And I always carried my Bible with me. And they said: "Yes, Father?! Because she is so clever." And they all approached my desk. They pulled out my Bible from under the bench and said to the priest: "She reads it. She reads the Bible."

[Translator]: Is this the same Bible, right?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. This Bible. And the priest got wise. He immediately figured out what was going on. And I was summoned to the school principal to talk. All right. So I approached the school principal. And it was... the school principal was a woman. And she said: Kuzminovna, what is going on? The priest sent you here to me, because you say something. What's the matter with you?." And I said: "Ms. Principal, after all, it's not... it is not your report. Just the priest's. So the priest should speak, not Ms. Principal." She laughed and said: "Indeed." And then she said: "Well, at least let me find out.." Well, and only then I said that she has probably heard about it, that there are Bible Students here and they are preaching. That there are public talks. And she said: "Yes. I have heard about it." And she did not ask any more questions. Now the clergy, that is the church, had to provide a basis to label me as... what was it called, a dissenter. That a dissenter can't get a high education.

[0:20:00] Because at that time, there was such a law, you see. And there was this professor, but to this day I don't know whose side he was on. But in any case, he was against the clergy. He knew my brother well, because they went to school together, and he knew me too. Whenever he saw me, he would always call me Saint Anna, without any negative connotation. And then he said to me: "Listen St. Anna, just be quiet, I'll make you stay in school, they have nothing to say." So I thought, well, that's good. And imagine that, he said: "Don't worry, you will stay in this school." And finally he came up with a way... Most of them were of the Mosaic faith there. The teachers were Jews. He knew that and he called a meeting of all the teachers to decide whether I should be expelled from the school. He said: "I'm in favor of her staying. She's my best student and she must stay in this school. Who is against it?." And everybody stood for me, no one objected. Because there was a majority, I stayed in school. I graduated from school, but I always worked. Only later, when I got married in 1930, I came to Warsaw. There was a lot of work in Warsaw at that time, because of banners...

[Background voice]: Banners.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Banners. In Warsaw, we went from door to door, to distant villages, preaching in the surrounding districts. There was a lot of work. And I've

always been so lucky because I have always liked office, to do office work. When I was young, I spent all my time there, and later it somehow fit me as well. When we already were here, it was 1939, in 1937 we moved to Pustelnik. There was no one in Pustelnik and a congregation was formed there. And imagine this, there were already a few publishers when the war broke out. Well, and it happened by chance that I was still with them until 1944, when the Warsaw Uprising began. Two or three days before the uprising, I went to Pruszków, to my husband's brother.

[Background voice]: _ _

[Anna Mielczarek]: And Franiu went with me as a child. And he stayed there. I thought to myself: "I'll come back here", I just wanted to go home and give my grandmother bread cards, because they were available. And imagine, while on my way, I reached the Kierbedzia bridge in the Praga district, and that's when the uprising broke out. They had already blocked the road, it was forbidden to go in that direction. So, I had to return to Warsaw. Anyway, I could not deliver the cards, and I didn't get to see the child anymore. Neither to Pruszków nor anywhere to go, because of the uprising in Warsaw. So, they took us to Kozia Street, because there was a hotel. There was enough space for everybody in this hotel. "In two days it will be the end of the uprising! In two days it will be the end of the uprising!" but four weeks have passed. But there they were telling so and one [woman said] to me... what do you want?

[Robert Buckley]: _ _

[Translator]: Could we go back to 1939 for a moment?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yeah.

[Translator]: Was the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses growing during this period?

[Anna Mielczarek]: It was a ban, the Germans forbade it. At that time Brother Kinicki was the editor of the *New Day* magazine. He had to hide, because they were catching all the Jehovah's Witnesses. It was a difficult time. And Brother Kinicki, I had the privilege of hosting him at our place in

Pustelnik... so that no one recognizes him. And he came to us to hide.
So I came to meet Brother Kinicki that time

[0:25:00] on the hill with my son, my child, he was young boy yet. And finally, I said, we greeted each other, and I knew that they had already given him the name Adam. And I said: "Good Morning" to him, "Adam." "How are you?." And he said: "This is Uncle Ludwik." And I said to him: "Listen. From today, he is Uncle Adam. Remember that. From now on." "I will remember." And he has made no mistake. He didn't turn him in. And that's how we lived until 1939, and later, during the uprising, when it broke out, when we went there, they took me away from the uprising. Later, the Germans took control of Warsaw, they took us, seized us, and sent us to a camp. So, at that time, I could not see my son, or my grandmother, or anyone else, because there was no access anywhere.

[Translator]: Perhaps you would like to tell us about it? When did this happen?
When did the German authorities arrest you?

[Anna Mielczarek]: When they entered. When they entered Poland, they immediately searched for Brother Kinicki, in the first place, because he was at the forefront, and that's why he had to hide. We were already working underground. There was no official activity. We would speak [about the truth] with people, with our neighbors, or when we went somewhere then we would share. It wasn't that we had to stop, but there were just no more official assemblies or official activities. The Branch was closed.

[Translator]: So you were constantly aware that you could be arrested at any time?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Sure, yes. It promised to be so... When Brother Kinicki was with us for so long, then his wife was coming and carrying literature or something to write to another place. And later, he created a hiding spot in the apartment, you know, in the floor, and secretly kept typewriters there, because there was already more work to do. It was no longer possible to travel back and forth. But it didn't last long. After all, it was 1939, and up to 1944, it wasn't a long time. During this period a lot of people learned the truth. The congregation was formed in Pustelnik, so it wasn't that bad with our work.

[Translator]: Have you heard about the arrests of brothers, sisters during this time?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes, yes, yes. Because when they had been caught with Watchtower, they were arrested. After all, a lot of brothers were arrested.

[Translator]: Was literature published during the war?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes, it was published. Not so often, but it was published. At that time everyone... it was published in its own way. A “new order” was created.

[Background voice]: But that's another topic.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Sorry?

[Background voice]: That's another topic.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. Also, you know, it was. Many brothers were in prison. And at that time they took us there.

[Translator]: When exactly was it?

[Anna Mielczarek]: In 1944, the Warsaw Uprising. And imagine, they... When that uprising collapsed, a lot of people were taken. A lot of ours were taken. That time they took us along with Brother Kinicki, Brother Jordanin...

[Translator]: Were you taken from your home?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Sorry?

[Translator]: Were you taken from your home?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No, they didn't take us from the house, because they went to the shelter and they took everything from there. And then took from home. They took everything.

[Translator]: Did the arrests involve only Poles or Jehovah's Witnesses as well?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Listen, at that time they arrested everyone, but they especially searched for Jehovah's Witnesses. Especially! They wanted to destroy a nation of

Witnesses. It's been hunt for Witnesses. Imagine that every priest was against Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Translator]: Did the Catholic clergy cooperate with the German authorities?

[Anna Mielczarek]: To whom did the AK belong?! It belonged to them. It is obvious. AK it was Catholic Action. I went with literature to everyone who belonged to the AK. But no one accepted.

[0:30:00]

[Background voice]: But, whether the clergy cooperated with Hitler is a different matter...

[Anna Mielczarek]: And that is...

[Background voice]: ...but they were all against Jehovah's Witnesses.

[Anna Mielczarek]: ...Witnesses, yes. And this first one... It is already evident, that the pope cooperated with Hitler. Their main aim was to slaughter all Jehovah's Witnesses and Jews. This was their direction, there is even a brochure.

[Robert Buckley]: How did the Gestapo treat her and _ _ _

[Translator]: Perhaps a few details about the arrest. Were you in the Gestapo at that time? How did they treat you?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Listen, in general, all lived some way. They didn't go from house to house in search of Witnesses. But when they saw some gathering or some literature, or someone with literature then they immediately arrested them.

[Translator]: Which means...

[Anna Mielczarek]: Took us to the camps.

[Translator]: So, when you were taken from home, where did they transport you?

[Anna Mielczarek]: They took us from the uprising.

[Translator]: From the uprising?

[Anna Mielczarek]: From the uprising. Many brothers were taken from the uprising, and before that, they searched the homes of some of our brothers, when someone turned them in, that they do something, or they have literature. It was not allowed. Oh! And that's when they took from homes. Mostly, brothers were taken...

[Background voice]: So, all this time since 1939 to 1944...

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes.

[Background voice]: All this time there were persecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses too.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes.

[Background voice]: They were arrested. But in the autumn of 1944, during the Warsaw Uprising, everyone was hiding in shelters, at homes or in the basements. When the Germans entered this places, they took whole groups.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Groups.

[Background voice]: They were taken, loaded onto trains and taken to concentration camps.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes.

[Translator]: Now let's talk about some details in connection with being sent to a camp. How old were you?

[Anna Mielczarek]: I was 29 years old then.

[Translator]: 29.

[Anna Mielczarek]: I was 29. And later to the camp.

[Translator]: What was the transportation like? From Warsaw to where?

[Anna Mielczarek]: From Warsaw to Pruszkow.

[Translator]: First to Pruszkow, right?

[Anna Mielczarek]: There was a large hall in Pruszkow, because there was a factory. And there were tracks and ramp. And everyone [was taken] there.

[Translator]: Men and women? Children?

[Anna Mielczarek]: All of them. There was no difference between such and such religion. Because before that, the Jews were oppressed. Oh! Everyone was directed there, because there was transportation from there.

[Translator]: How many people could be in that hall?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Sorry?

[Translator]: How many people could be in that hall?

[Anna Mielczarek]: At once there were... Because they brought people in several times. This hall was huge. Let me think. I think 300 people were in that hall, because it was quite big hall.

[Background voice]: More.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Or more. Because it was a big hall.

[Translator]: How long did they keep you there?

[Anna Mielczarek]: They kept us there until the transport arrived.

[Translator]: You mean hours or days?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No. They kept us for 2-3 days until the transport arrived, and then they took us to such cars.

[Background voice]: Wagons.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Wagons. Cattle wagons. 70 people were packed.

[Translator]: Into the one wagon?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Into the one. They gave a loaf of bread.

[Translator]: How did German soldiers or the Gestapo treat you?

[Anna Mielczarek]: When it comes to Gestapo, they treated others badly. When they took for interrogation, brothers were beaten. There were also serious accidents. But when they took us together, then they didn't know who is who. Just took [us] and transported. Transported us to the camps.

[Translator]: Did they give you something to eat, in that hall, something to eat...?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Sorry?

[Translator]: Did they give you something to eat when...?

[Anna Mielczarek]: They gave a loaf of bread and [...].

[Translator]: Per day?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Not per day, but for a few days.

[Translator]: For a few days.

[Anna Mielczarek]: For a few days. And they brought black coffee with no sugar. And they gave us a loaf of bread for the road. Oh!

[Translator]: 70 people. Were they families, or have they already separated into men and women?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No, these were all families. Those who were caught, those who were in the bunker. They were taking all families to transport. There were a lot of families with children, they took everyone. They didn't separate them there. They only separated them

[0:35:00] in Mauthausen. Oh! That's where they really separated them. There were...

[Translator]: Have you known or surmised where they are taking you?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No. We didn't know where they were transporting us, because no one told us. Only later, during the journey, we started asking: "Where are we going?." It's going in that direction. And when we were there, [he]

said: “Here it is....” Then we started to think. Someone said we are going to Linz, and later someone else said we were going to...

[Background voice]: Mauthausen.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Not to Mauthausen. No one thought about it, only when we arrived at Mauthausen then everyone: “Hyyy! Mauthausen!.” Everyone felt relief. Because no one exactly knew where we are, just that it was in that direction. Later, as we passed the mountains, people immediately recognized. Below we saw Czech houses, those brick houses. And later, when they took us on transport from Mauthausen then we knew for sure. Oh! We didn't know where either. We were just being transported. They didn't say anything. Only, when we arrived at the stop... When we had a stop in Lipsk then we thought: “Oh! Here we go.” And I said: “Oh, here are the fir trees”, “such pine trees” I said, “like in Pustelnik village.” And we all laughed. And later, there was nothing. Only one sister had her daughter in the camp already, in Ravensbrück. And she said: “You know, it looks like they're taking us to the Ravensbrück.” And indeed, it wasn't long before we arrived there.

[Translator]: How long did the transport take?

[Anna Mielczarek]: You know. Not too long.

[Background voice]: Don't cover your mouth or you won't be heard.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Sorry?

[Background voice]: Don't cover your mouth or you won't be heard.

[Anna Mielczarek]: The travel did not take long. The train went on and on.

[Translator]: I meant, we asked: one day or two?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Three.

[Translator]: As long as three days!

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: Imagine a route from Mauthausen to Ravensbrück, think how long it is. Especially as we were driven by a clunker... in such cattle wagons... And from time to time it had a stop for us to do our business.

[*Translator*]: How did it actually look like? Did they let you all leave the wagon for some time or one by one?

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: Do you know how it was? So now, I tell you how exactly it looked like. There was no time for one by one, they were just saying: "Stop. Get out."

[*Translator*]: All of you?

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: Yes. Everybody. But before he even said it, everyone has had their pants at that height, and women skirt at this height. And children were naked. And everyone was going down into the ditch. Whole huddle. They were rushed: "Schneller, schneller, schneller." And everybody got into the wagon naked or half-naked. That's how the journey looked like.

[*Translator*]: Did they give it a short time?

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: Short time. More than one even didn't make it.

[*Translator*]: Did they shoot anyone who didn't get into the wagon?

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: If he had stayed, they would have shot him. But they didn't do that along the way. And that's how the journey passed. Oh! Let me tell you what we did. We stayed in that wagon, our little group of brothers and sisters. We were ashamed to do what the rest did. It was a nightmare to do this. But there was no other way. These people had no choice. And I was sitting there thinking that this is the worst situation for me. You know, I always had that stomach issue, and I felt so ashamed. And I had such a pocket knife. I took out the pocket knife and I sat a little further away. I said to the other sisters: "Find a way to cover me. We'll try to make a hole in the boards of this wagon." And they passed it to the brothers. They said: "You know what? Let's do it this way." And imagine that we made quite a big hole...

[*Background voice*]: Do not lean over, because then we will not see you.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Okay. So we had a quite big hole ready to use. We did not have to get off the train, but we took care of our needs in that hole. And so, sisters covered sisters, brothers covered brothers. Everything went so quickly that no one even noticed what was happening. Absolutely nobody, because we were all sitting in one group.

[0:40:00] And so we arrived.

[Translator]: So did the soldiers have no regard for such feelings of the people?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No. There was only one soldier assigned to guard in every second wagon. Not so many people to watch, isn't it? Because who is going to run away? So there was only one who guarded two wagons.

[Translator]: So after three days you arrived at Mauthausen?

[Anna Mielczarek]: To Ravensbrück.

[Translator]: To Ravensbrück?

[Anna Mielczarek]: To Ravensbrück?

[Background voice]: Probably first to Mauthausen?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Oh! From Mauthausen we arrived. I said, to Mat... From Mauthausen to Ravensbrück.

[Translator]: So that is...

[Anna Mielczarek]: And we traveled to Mauthausen like that. We arrived from Poland straight to Mauthausen, just as I told you. And then in Mauthausen, it ended up because they took us to the blocks. Maybe not exactly to blocks, but to shacks.

[Translator]: So were there soldiers or Gestapo waiting at the station?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No.

[Translator]: No?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No.

[Background voice]: No. The wagons were entering the camp.

[Translator]: The camp?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. The wagons were entering the camp. They were getting off and threw people out of the train. And they all walked uphill. There were already a couple of...

[Translator]: So up to that point, were you together, the whole family?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes, the whole family.

[Translator]: And you came to the place. What was happening next?

[Anna Mielczarek]: We also arrived at the place together.

[Translator]: Yes. And then...

[Anna Mielczarek]: We arrived together. All of us, just as we were in the wagons, we arrived there together. Together with our brothers, we reached Mauthausen. And in Mauthausen, let me tell you... They didn't segregate us there as "Jehovah's Witnesses." It was a "temporary" stop for everyone to await further transportation. After that, we had a quite comfortable journey. All the prisoners were supposed to have a good journey because there were Pullman cars. Those wagons were comfortable. So now, everyone was happy to go by Pullman. We finally got some relief from the misery. On the way to Mauthausen, we had a stop in Vienna. The Viennese have made a very nice effort. They gave everyone a liter pot of pearl barley with crackling. It was a favorite flavor of the Galileans and Germans. Everyone said: "Poles are going. Poles." They prepared it for the Poles, because only Poles were in this transport. So they gave such a "ledpopad" for everyone, and when we finished they asked us to put the pot aside so they can clean this up later. So we were fed. Later, we were transported out by train from Vienna to Ravensbrück. And we arrived.

[Translator]: Was this name already known?

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: Yes. We already knew where we are.

[*Background voice*]: It was a women's camp.

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: Women's camp. So we already knew where we are. In Ravensbrück.

[*Robert Buckley*]: So she has been transported out from Mauthausen to Ravensbrück.

[*Translator*]: Ravensbrück.

[*Robert Buckley*]: Ask her when she gets ready for that ____, but ask her if they have shaved hair or something like this in Mauthausen.

[*Translator*]: As for Mauthausen. Have they done such things there, like hair shaving?

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: No. Because it was just a temporary stop. We spent in there two or three weeks only.

[*Background voice*]: The Germans decided where to send.

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: Yes. They had to plan transportation and other things. Because in Mauthausen the prisoners were man, so we had separately spread tarpaulins.

[*Background voice*]: Tents.

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: Tents. Spread. There were several people in each tent.

[*Translator*]: How many people per one tent?

[*Anna Mielczarek*]: Even five-person families were placed in tents. Mostly such families were placed in tents. And imagine that, the food in Mauthausen was quite good for those who stopped there for two or three weeks. They gave us rice on milk. And it was good food. They told us: "Don't give up Polish women." They were saying:

[0:45:00] "Don't give up Polish women", because they wanted to support Polish. Only later, when we were sent to Ravensbrück then...

[Translator]: And did you know when there would be a decision on referral to one camp or another?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Who would know?!

[Translator]: That is, were you waiting for developments day by day?

[Anna Mielczarek]: We were waiting to see where they would send us, but we never knew where it would be.

[Background voice]: Nor when.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Nor when.

[Translator]: So, after two weeks was the name of Ravensbrück mentioned for the first time? After two weeks in Mauthausen?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes.

[Background voice]: No. They didn't say where they transferred you.

[Anna Mielczarek]: They didn't say.

[Background voice]: They took them to the train.

[Anna Mielczarek]: For transportation.

[Background voice]: Yes.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. For transportation and that's it.

[Translator]: Mhm.

[Anna Mielczarek]: And that's it, there was no talk about where we were going.

[Translator]: Yes. But after two weeks, the soldiers came and then...?

[Anna Mielczarek]: There were no soldiers, only the SS.

[Translator]: The SS.

[Anna Mielczarek]: They led the entire group. Only they were there. So no one has escaped. They told only to get into. But where were we going? None of them said. They were just like “Go! Go! Let’s go!!” So you never knew where you were going. Only that it was quite comfortable. Because then we went by Polish Pullman cars.

[Translator]: Pullman cars.

[Anna Mielczarek]: The ride was good, because it was comfortable to sit. And we arrived at Ravensbrück.

[Translator]: How long did it take?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Not long. It didn't take long to get to Ravensbrück. And the road was going well.

[Translator]: Women only, am I right?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Women only. The men stayed in Mauthausen.

[Translator]: In Mauthausen.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. And our brothers were killed there. Brother Kinicki and his son, as well as Brother Jordanin with his son, stayed at Mauthausen. Now I'm talking about Jehovah's Witnesses. Because we were interested in our brothers, not others. They stayed there in Mauthausen.

[Translator]: Have they already asked in Mauthausen if anyone is a Jehovah’s Witness?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes.

[Translator]: Have they already taken an interest in it?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Listen, they didn't have to ask. It was enough that they heard the name Kinicki. They wanted to catch him, but until then, they had not been able to. Because he was always hiding or someone was hiding him. Only there they caught him. He never come out of there. Likewise, other brothers. Only Brother Kinicki's son and Brother Jordan's son

came out of the camp, because they were transported somewhere else. But the others stayed there and we never heard of them again.

[Translator]: Now back to Ravensbrück. When did you arrive there?

[Anna Mielczarek]: We arrived to *Ravensbrück* – just let me think. We were taken in August. Either at the end of August or the beginning of...

[Translator]: September?

[Anna Mielczarek]: September. Yes. I have these dates written down somewhere, but you know...

[Translator]: How was the arrival? What was the entrance to the camp like?

[Anna Mielczarek]: About the entrance to Ravensbrück camp. We got off the train. They led us down a wide road.

[Translator]: Were you guarded by the SS with dogs, were they armed?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No. There were only soldiers, only the SS.

[Translator]: The SS guards.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Only the SS. They took us to Ravensbrück. And when they closed the gate, I thought it's over. And it was still warm then, but none of had good clothes. We slept two or three nights on the sand in the cold. In the camp, in Ravensbrück, there were our sisters before. There was one Czech sister. She was petite, shapely and always all over the place.

[0:50:00] And when they found out that the "Bibelforscher women" transport had arrived, because Germans called us Bibelforscher, they immediately started looking for us. And they found us, because we showed up. She told us right away. Because there was a big office at the gate. And thousands stood on the sand, where they had previously slept, and waited for their turn to register at the office. So they said: "Give the name Jehovahs Zeugen." Because they asked about religion then. At that time in every country they asked about religion. So they said: "Give the name: Jehovahs Zeugen." And we did so. There were five of us. Then we were together yet. It was nice to see people you know. We waited for our

turn and then signed: "Jehovas Zeugen." All we signed confirmation of faith: "Jehovas Zeugen." Then they register us and sent us to the blocks. You know how it was later on.

[Translator]: When did the registration take place? When did you receive the number? Can you show it?

[Anna Mielczarek]: This is the number I received in Sachsenhausen, so it's a different number. In Ravensbrück I got the number 67 900... 900 with something. I did not take this document, because I had a lot of documents there. Wait a moment. No, I did not take it.

[Translator]: Anyway, after these three days...

[Anna Mielczarek]: This number...

[Translator]: It has been established that...

[Anna Mielczarek]: Established...

[Translator]: ...you are Jehovah's Witnesses...

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. When everyone was registered at the office, they sent us at first to bath.

[Translator]: And that bath, what was it?

[Anna Mielczarek]: It was a big bathhouse, cold water and shower. And everyone had to take a bath.

[Translator]: Had to? Was it public?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. Group.

[Translator]: Group.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. To bathe. And everyone had to be deloused and combed head.

[Translator]: Did they shave your heads then?

[Anna Mielczarek]: When they found one nit in someone's hair, they cut the hair.

[Translator]: Otherwise, didn't they cut the hair?

[Anna Mielczarek]: They didn't. They left five of us with hair. But they combed very thoroughly... They didn't give up. They were disappointed that they didn't find any nits. They had special combs, which combed everything out of the hair. And they couldn't find any nits. They tried once, tried a second time, but they couldn't. So they finally let us go and didn't cut our hair. Only our hair was not cut. So we were very pleased. We laughed a lot about it. Later we were taken to the block. They took us to the blocks for the night. When I woke up in the morning, you know how a person stays awake so many nights. It was cold, as we slept on the sand. So this sister brought us three or four blankets to cover ourselves, because the nights were cold.

[Translator]: So, do you see a difference between the behavior of fellow prisoners who were Jehovah's Witnesses and other fellow prisoners? Did the attitude differ?

[Anna Mielczarek]: There was no difference! Only this sister quietly slipped those blankets under the wires for us.

[Translator]: I mean, did Jehovah's Witnesses stick together, help each other?

[Anna Mielczarek]: At Ravensbrück, they stuck together. At the time there were 585 of us, so they stuck together until someone turned them in. They found a typewriter. Brothers and sisters worked there and brothers delivered documents from outside. Then as it turned out, one SS man posed as a Jehovah's Witness. The brothers didn't know and trusted him, but he turned them all in. And after that they dispersed everyone. All the sisters were put into different blocks. One or two per block, so they were not together. The brothers already had a symbol there.

[Translator]: And did you have that Bible with you all the time in the camp?

[0:55:00]

[Anna Mielczarek]: All the time. And do you know how? When you walked into the bath-house, you had to take everything off and throw into the basket. Everything had to be thrown into this basket. And all the gold too... And I had such a nice gold watch. Bum! to this basket. And then I see that others hide the gold in the bags where they folded their clothes, in case they go out so they have a deposit. They were doing it foolishly. “For foolish gold!” – I thought. So I put the Bible into that deposit. Between the clothes – I threw it! It was taken along with the clothes – that’s why I have it. Later, they gave us work to do. At Ravensbrück, we worked hard. We chopped woods, trees. I like to work in the forest so even when it came to cutting a tree with a saw, it was a piece of cake for me. But those delicate women, they struggled. And it wasn’t easy for us either because we had to stand there for so many hours and... But it was _ . Later we were taken to sand work, because they were making a road there. They selected certain people. And we ended up together, me and one sister. She lives... they live... I don’t know where exactly they live now.

[Background voice]: Near Warsaw.

[Anna Mielczarek]: Where?

[Background voice]: In Wola Grzybowska.

[Anna Mielczarek]: They now live in Wola Grzybowska. And with this sister. I was 29 at the time, and she was 18. So it was the age difference, right? And we were loading sand on the carts. And it was such a downpour! We were lashed by rain and sleet. How many women died there! It was something terrible! And there was one man just walking around, watching what everyone was doing and beating them, beating them. He had a big stick. It was horrible. They assigned us to work with the sand. And we looked where the SS man was. Still far away. Then I said: “We won’t last long here. It’s so cold.” We had big shovels and the cart was high. We needed to take this sand on the shovel and later on the cart. So it was hard to get it done... but people had to. If any of them didn’t work, she took a beating. Straight away. And finally I said: “Lodzia, take a quarter or half a shovelful at a time and go running, otherwise we won’t warm up”, I said, “and you won’t make it.” She was young. “You won’t be able to get a full shovel up the hill quickly.” And imagine this, we did that, and I thought: Oh! I was so quick to take a quarter on that

shovel, not for work, just to warm up. Or half a shovelful at a time and throw on the cart, and again, and again on the cart! And so we were looking where the SS man is. Lodzia was on one side, and I was on the other. And I think: "My Lodzia went silent!." She took such a big shovel and placed it on top. And she went silent. And I said to her: "Why are you suddenly so quick?!" And she didn't say anything to me. I thought: "O! That's not good." I hadn't even turned around, and his hand was already on my shoulder, imagine that. He grabbed me by the shoulder, took a closer look, because I had a purple triangle.

[Background voice]: Which one?

[Anna Mielczarek]: No, not this one. This one is from...

[Translator]: From Sachsenhausen.

[Background voice]: From Sachsenhausen.

[Anna Mielczarek]: From Sachsenhausen. And then he took it from me, looked at me, asked for a shovel, took the shovel. He showed me that I need to take a full shovelful and only then load to the cart. I said: "all right." He smiled and walked away. He didn't do anything to me, because he saw that I worked fast. And it saved me. Then he walked away. And this young girl said: "I was just waiting to see what he would do. Oh my, I couldn't say anything." You see, the work was so hard there. Soon after they changed our work assignment.

[1:00:00] We went to work with the horses. When I heard that we were going to work with horses, I sat down. With the horses. But we didn't say anything. Twelve people were selected for this work. And the SS man who selected us said: "Just keep quiet, don't say anything, because you are getting a good job. You get a sheepskin coat and warm gloves for the winter! And a whole cart of cold cuts and bread! Only distribute them around the camp, around the blocks. And deliver to the other camp, to the men's camp. I didn't like it that much, but you can't say no. So we didn't say anything. Then, the next day, different decision was made that there would be a different work at the block. So we accepted the decision. We went there. There we were directed to work at the IKN in Sachsenhausen. IKN. It is Inspection Concentration Lager. It was a huge edifice. There were only high-ranking officers: ober_, _, ober_

and another one, and an even higher ranking officer up to S – how it was? Hess or another one, whatever - all the generals. It was a huge and beautiful building. And they took us to work there. They had private women there, but they were not satisfied with their cleaning. And imagine, they said: “If we take Jehovah's Witnesses to work, then we will keep the building clean.” And they assigned us to this work. There was some work to be done. When we got to work, after two weeks the building looked completely different. So... And there we worked, unfortunately.

[Translator]: How far is Sachsenhausen from Ravensbrück?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Some 30 km, I think. It was close. But when we went to work they told us it was very far away. Everyone was saying: “Oh, where are we going so far?.” Until finally the train stops. We take a look – Oranienburg. Here?! Oranienburg. And there was a women's camp in Oranienburg. Sachsenhausen was just behind Oranienburg. Because in Oranienburg there was Sachsenhausen. And there we stayed to work.

[Translator]: Is this the second time you have been given these numbers?

[Anna Mielczarek]: Yes. We already got them in the second job.

[Translator]: Could you show us?

[Robert Buckley]: Have her put it on... have her hold it on.

[Background voice]: Take it in your hands and show, that this is the number I got...

[Robert Buckley]: Up, higher. Yeah. Higher.