

[0:00:00]

[Piano music]

Robert Buckley: We're interviewing Mrs. Mary Schnell. Mrs. Schnell, would you please tell us your name, your maiden name, and where you reside at the present time?

Mary Schnell: Well, my name is Mary Schnell. I'm born in this country. Was in 1914 in Detroit, Michigan, but I was raised in Poland. When I was eight years of age, my parents took me to Poland, and I stayed there until 1961. So you notice that my language is not really correct. It's some mistakes.

Robert Buckley: I understand. No problem. Would you please tell us the name of your father and your mother? And what type of work did your father do?

Mary Schnell: Well, my father. My father's name is Walter. My mother is Victoria.

Robert Buckley: And your last name?

Mary Schnell: **Barschowsky**. It's very difficult for English people to pronounce but it's Polish, Polish name. They both are of Polish extraction. And my father, he was working in Detroit for Ford company, automobiles company. And the reason – I don't know. The reason what he said he wanted to go back to Poland, the first of all, that it was of the war and he was Polish, of Polish nationality. And then he said in Poland is better weather, see. In Detroit he said he didn't feel well. So we were three sisters. The one was four years of age. The third was just born—three.

Robert Buckley: And what were their names?

Mary Schnell: The second was Sophie and the youngest, about maybe six weeks of age, Helen. So we went to Poland.

Robert Buckley: And where did you move to? What was the name of the city and town?

Mary Schnell: Well, we were like gypsies, see. First, we went to the place were my parents were born. So my parents lived in the village, so we stayed maybe two, three months, and then we moved to the city.

[0:05:00] The city is called Rzeszów. And my husband bought beautiful villa with some ... how to say? It was nice possession, but in Poland was so. When you came from America and you had a house, you don't need to work. But when you don't work, you cannot eat. Was very difficult, so we stayed there only about three years. And then was another moving, then another moving to another state. So my husband – my father moved to the country to the village, which was unusual for me because I was not acquainted with such a life. I was born in the city; was very difficult.

So then I went to school. I didn't finish too much school. Then I went to the office as a practicer – how to say? Not like a routine person, just to learn. And I learned about three, four years with the lawyer. With the lawyer I learned. Then we moved again. My father, he left everything what he bought and another [laughs]. So we went – you know where we went? We went to Gdynia. It's a place where I really got normal job, and I was legal secretary later, and I worked seven years there. Then came war.

Robert Buckley: So you were a legal secretary?

Mary Schnell: Yeah, I was legal secretary.

Robert Buckley: And what was the town that you worked in as a secretary?

Mary Schnell: In Gdynia. It was close to Danzig.

Robert Buckley: Did you work for one attorney or two or three or ...

Mary Schnell: This was one. He was one. One but there was a big, big office, big office.

Robert Buckley: Did you have any outside interests? Did you like skiing or ...

Mary Schnell: Skiing? No.

Robert Buckley: Or did you play any instruments?

Mary Schnell: No, it was too far. But in summer I went to the beach because it was close to the beach even when we had break for lunch, two hours. So I went and from my window I could see my sea, Baltic Sea. Was beautiful place, was a beautiful place. Then the war came.

Robert Buckley: Now, when did the war start where you were at?

- Mary Schnell:* Started in the first. I think was first day of September 1939.
- Robert Buckley:* What did the Polish people at that time feel about Germany and Hitler from what you remembered? Since you worked in a law office, what was the talk that was in the office about Adolf Hitler and Germany and what he was doing since 1933? What was the atmosphere?
- Mary Schnell:* Well, in the office we didn't talk about [it]. Even the wife of my attorney, my boss, she was even German, was German. And he was the son of high school teacher, but he was very nice man. I worked for him seven years, and I could work longer. But I couldn't because the war came. He was—how do you say—conscripted.
- Robert Buckley:* Into the army?
- Mary Schnell:* The army as officer and few days he was already wounded.
- Robert Buckley:* So he was in the Polish army.
- Mary Schnell:* Polish, Polish, yes and the office was closed.
- Robert Buckley:* Up to that time, what was your religious background?
- Mary Schnell:* Catholic but I was never – I was never practicing Catholic because long time ago, I saw too much hypocrisy. You would not believe. When I came from America to Poland and I was at age eight, when I heard what the priests coming to our class was talking all the time and threatening us with hellfire, I didn't like it because my heart and my mind told me that God is good and must be better than I am in all ways.
- [0:10:00]
- Robert Buckley:* Now, was this in America or was this in Poland?
- Mary Schnell:* In Poland, in Poland. And I had to go every Sunday to church because going to church was through the school, and we were on the list. And when somebody didn't come, get the mark on the list that you didn't show up in the school going to – and one Sunday I didn't go to school. Why? Because was very bad weather, so my father said, "You stay home." I didn't go. Then when we – when come the half year of giving certificates, my grade of religion was lower. And the priest said: "You know why? You are good in religion. But one Sunday you didn't go to church." [Laughs] "But

in the end of the year at the school, you get certificate. Very good, very good.” So I didn’t like what he said.

Then when we moved to the village and I had to go to another school, the second time, there was no teaching by the priest of religion by priests but by teachers. There was no forcing going to school so I stopped. About ten years of age I stopped [going] to church.

Robert Buckley: Did you notice in Poland that the Church was supporting the Polish troops at all to fight against the German people? Did you notice that?

Mary Schnell: Before this happened, I was thinking. But I understood this better when the war broke out. I couldn’t believe what I saw—soldiers marching through the cathedral for supporting the war against their enemies, of course.

Robert Buckley: The soldiers went to the cathedral?

Mary Schnell: Catholic, yes.

Robert Buckley: The Catholic cathedral.

Mary Schnell: Cathedral, yes. I said, My! The Catholic artillery with weapons and everything!” I said, ‘That’s enough. That’s enough for me!’

Robert Buckley: And did you know that the Catholic people there were going to be fighting against the Catholic people in Germany?

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes. Of course, I knew. And before I learned the truth. Before I learned the truth, I knew that German Catholic were fighting against Polish Catholic and Polish against. And I met some Germans by the work when I work. Soldiers came to me and one soldier said ... how they say? “I am Deutsch Catholic, I am German Catholic.”

And I thought, ‘What do you think? You are better because you are telling me that you are German and you are Catholic? That cannot be better. What do you think?’ *[Laughs]*

Robert Buckley: OK, so then you were a Catholic in your background. When did you come in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses? After the war got started?

Mary Schnell: Well, this is pretty complicated because when we were in this country, I know that my father, he had some contact with Jehovah's Witnesses—some—because one day before we left for Poland, he took me to see Photo Drama.

Robert Buckley: Now what is the Photo Drama? What is that?

Mary Schnell: You don't know what's Photo Drama. That's a picture, you know. It's a film showing many biblical pictures from the Bible.

Robert Buckley: And who produced that?

Mary Schnell: There's a pastor, you know. They called him "pastor," Charles Russell. Charles Russell, yes. And I was seven years of age. I liked this very much. I remember one picture. I don't know should I tell you this or not maybe?

Robert Buckley: Sure.

[0:15:00]

Mary Schnell: I liked it. I never forgot. There was a picture fighting, some fight. From one side bad people with their faces [*scowls fiercely*] and another side there were priests, bishops fighting. [*Smiles*] And the word was Armageddon, Armageddon. You know the word "Armageddon" is in the Bible. And the Bible says that the time will come that God will put end with all wickedness from the earth. And this, his action, will be God's war, and God's war is called Armageddon.

Robert Buckley: And then what will happen to the earth?

Mary Schnell: And the earth will be cleansed from all wickedness because, see, when wicked is on the earth, there's no peace. There's no peace. And we pray in our Lord's Prayer and I know from the Bible – the Bible says that Jesus Christ was teaching us to pray for God's Kingdom for his will be done as [in] heaven so also here on the earth. So when here on the earth should be – will be God's will as in heaven, there must be peace, and people must be good like angels in heaven.

Robert Buckley: So your first contact then with Jehovah's Witnesses was back in Detroit, Michigan.

Mary Schnell: Yes.

- Robert Buckley:* Now, when did you come in contact with them in Poland?
- Mary Schnell:* See, later when I came, when we came to Poland was always like forgotten, but I never forgot Photo Drama. This I never forgot, see. I never forgot. And very often now I hear about this mention about Photo Drama, see. It's very important. And my father – I don't know. There was no, nowhere Witnesses. My father didn't say anything. They're working. When voting was in Poland, voting, I know my father didn't vote, but he didn't explain why. So my mother went for voting and I – but we didn't vote. Just we put in blank, you know, what say. *[Laughs]* Father didn't explain [to] us, so I say, 'For whom should I vote?' I knew some personally and I thought, 'No, I would not vote for [him.] Why? Why? No, no. And then besides I know you are always on the side of the clergy so no.'
- Robert Buckley:* Now, that was before 1939 before Hitler came.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, yes, yes, yes. Still, I was worldly girl, worldly girl. And I told my husband yesterday—maybe I repeat you now—how I prayed to God, but God listened.
- Robert Buckley:* Yes.
- Mary Schnell:* I didn't believe in the rosary. This was something stupid—pray again and again and again. The Bible says because we pray and pray repetitiously, we will not be heard. But I prayed once the Our Father and the Holy Mary? Is it _____? See, I forgot already *[laughs]*. And then say ...
- Robert Buckley:* That's the Hail Mary.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes. Once this, once this and ... be praised, Jesus Christ like this. But this was my composition, see. And sometimes I prayed with my own, yes, my own thoughts. And then when the war came, I was very sick. I had scarlet fever.
- Robert Buckley:* All right so that was 1939 September. How old were you then when the war started?
- Mary Schnell:* Oh, maybe 25, 24 ... 25.
- Robert Buckley:* Were you married at the time?
- Mary Schnell:* No, no, no, no. When – but during the war already when Hitler was there, [I] was very sick in [the] hospital. And I thought [to] myself,

‘Well, when you die, you lose nothing. I remember my father told me someday that when people die, they will come back. We’ll be resurrected.

[0:20:00] That’s fine, so I don’t need to suffer. But I didn’t die *[laughs]*. The time came I learn the truth *[laughs]*.

Robert Buckley: OK so the war came and you were sick with scarlet fever and you went to a hospital?

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: Now, where were you at when the war started? What was the name of the town?

Mary Schnell: The town? Gdynia. This is the harbor city, port city, close to Danzig.

Robert Buckley: Did the Germans bomb it?

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: Do you remember the bombing?

Mary Schnell: I remember one day I was in the office. Then everybody left the office and there came a priest, one priest who was the brother of my colleague. And he wanted to take me out from – and put – and place – go someplace because there was alarm. The air raid is coming. And I thought, ‘I will never go with the priest. What protection I will have when I go with him? He’s not God’s servant.’ *[Laughs]* I didn’t go, and I left by myself. I was in such a condition that I could be not only killed but shot in pieces. But angels, you know, they protected me. Was such in few minutes you couldn’t recognize the city. Our city was destroyed. And I was so close from the shrapnel, and I looked through the window. There were no windows, and everything what was in the office on the shelves and everywhere fell on the ... and I thought the house, the building would completely collapse with me. The next was level with the earth. I survived.

Robert Buckley: So you were in an underground shelter in the basement?

Mary Schnell: No, I was not. I left in the office.

Robert Buckley: You stayed right in the office?

- Mary Schnell:* Yes. I put myself in the corner, see, like you see the corner here. And the shrapnel close to my feet like this
- Robert Buckley:* OK so then after that bombing, what did you do between then and time when you came in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses?
- Mary Schnell:* Oh, I was already in the truth already. I was. That time I was in the truth.
- Robert Buckley:* Well, when did you come in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses?
- Mary Schnell:* See, I worked in the office for the **Krischer**, as I had told you. I work in this office. I was typist. Using the shorthand I learned in German shorthand, and he used me and then, aha! What I did meantime I learned piano. I learned piano. And someday I came to my acquaintance. She was – how to say? She was like fortuneteller. Like fortuneteller she was. I knew her good, so I went to her. She always told me something.
- Then one day I came to her and she said, “I cannot tell you anything today.”
- “Why not?”
- “Because your mind is not with me.” [*Gesturing opposites with hands*] See, the demonic, you know? No demonic contact. I didn’t know that. She said: “No. Well, maybe we talk about something else.”
- “What about?”
- She want[ed] to tell me about Armageddon, and she wanted to tell me, yes, really about Armageddon, but she forgot the word. “And do you remember – do you believe in the end of the earth?” she said.
- “Oh, yes. I believe. My father taught me.”
- “Oh.” Then she said, “You know, I have somebody who can tell you more.”
- “OK.” So she made contact with the lady and me someday.
- [0:25:00] And they both were of Russian extraction, both. And the sister, I learned later that anytime she met her, she always witnessed to her, but there was no progress. Was such a progress that she did even

forget the word “Armageddon.” She couldn’t tell me. So she made contact and appointment, so I met her in her home, but her language was not good. She spoke so funny the Polish and Russia[n], and I like beautiful language. So then she said, “Well, I give you somebody else who speak good,” and she contacted me with one brother.

Robert Buckley: So these people were Jehovah's Witnesses then?

Mary Schnell: The brother. She was sister, and she contacted me with the brother. It was simple brother, but at least he spoke not broken. And he was very well-acquainted and versed in the Bible and I liked. So she [sic] came to our house. My father, he was a little jealous because strong.

Robert Buckley: Oh, very good. Stop a moment.

[Video resumes]

Mary Schnell: Said, “Oh, I know this longer before you!” he said. So another brother came who started to teach me, so he was jealous. And he was very regular, regular. One meeting, one meeting, one session he missed. He didn’t come. So I waited until 12 o’clock in the night. I knew he would not come, but still I waited. [It] was Sunday. I could go outside, but I didn’t go. OK, he couldn’t. So someday I learned we have to witness, witness, witness. So I’m not a commercial agent that I have to go to people like people go with something, what they have to sell. It’s funny. It’s humiliating, I think. But finally, I started to understand. I said I have to start. But I tell nobody. Someday I choose one door on some high flight or how to say flight? Flight? Flat? Knock the door, Polish people. I don’t know how to talk. I talk. People like, oh, look at me so afraid. “Oh,” I said. “Once is enough.” The brother said not everybody will hear. Not everybody will listen.” I didn’t believe. Such a good thing. Now, I’m convinced. Yeah, I see when you talk to people, you must be prepared. Either people listen or not or maybe they’ll be very even dangerous.

Robert Buckley: So when was that—1938, 1939?

Mary Schnell: No, no, this was already ’43.

Robert Buckley: Oh, so this was after the war started.

Mary Schnell: It was I started to learn because I learned ‘ 43.

Robert Buckley: So that's when you started to learn, so you were still working in the law office?

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: OK so you're still working for the attorney.

Mary Schnell: No, no, Herr Krischer.

Robert Buckley: Oh, the company.

Mary Schnell: German.

Robert Buckley: Oh, a German company, OK.

Mary Schnell: German company.

Robert Buckley: So you were working in the office as a secretary –

Mary Schnell: No, not secretary – just typist.

Robert Buckley: A typist.

Mary Schnell: Typist with shorthand like this, yes.

Robert Buckley: I see. So then you came in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses in 1943.

Mary Schnell: When I started to learn piano, yes.

Robert Buckley: I see. Now, what got you in trouble then that you were picked up by the Gestapo? What happened?

Mary Schnell: Oh, well, when I learned the truth, then I learned I cannot type “Heil Hitler”. If I type “Heil Hitler,” I feel I supported this greeting, and my conscience started to bother me. It was very difficult because all the time you type, you type, you type “Heil Hitler” and then, suddenly not. In [the] meantime when I stopped, he was arrested.

Robert Buckley: Who?

Mary Schnell: Krischer because of immorality in the office.

Robert Buckley: Oh, you mean the man who had the office ...

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: ... was arrested because of immorality?

Mary Schnell: Yes.

[0:30:00]

Robert Buckley: What happened there?

Mary Schnell: [Laughs] Well, I don't know how to tell you. He wanted put even the bed in the office that some girl can in the night, you know, live with him, love with him. And there was one very young girl, and I think mentally she's not complete 100 percent she was although she was from good family. The family was architect or something. And she told us that that night she had intercourse with two men, with Krischer and his friend. And then because he was so bad, then we started to talk, started to be loud.

Robert Buckley: Why did the Germans care?

Mary Schnell: Why? I don't know.

Robert Buckley: They came and picked him up as a result of that.

Mary Schnell: They took him and later—I don't know what he did—he came back. And then meantime, I started – I took advantage of this, you know, not to type. His wife came from Germany. Then I tried to be freed from this job and said I want to go to another job, physical job not ...

Robert Buckley: Because you didn't want to type "Heil Hitler."

Mary Schnell: Yes and she was ready to do for me. But when he came back, then no. He wanted to have me back. Then he – she – how to say? He made the ... seal, not seal ... [speaking Polish] I forget some words that he said, "You don't need to type "Heil Hitler". Just with the stamp." He made a stamp, you know.

Robert Buckley: So you wouldn't have to type it.

Mary Schnell: No, you don't type. Just put the stamp. No, I said no. So he went to the Gestapo and he talked to the chief of Gestapo. He was his good friend. And the friend, I learned, the chief friend, his name was **Teufel**. And Teufel in English it means "devil" so fitting name for him [laughs]. So they cooperated now. Give me back, give me

back. They will do everything that I come back. And I prayed to Jehovah: “No, I don’t know what will happen to me but I want to please you and pray. I love you Jehovah.” And I didn’t tell my parents because my mother was very sick. [S]he was bedridden sick, so I couldn’t tell. But the night was very hard for me. I couldn’t sleep. I fight. I prayed to Jehovah. And I thought, ‘Tomorrow in the morning for sure you will be arrested.’

Robert Buckley: Now, when was that—1943?

Mary Schnell: Forty-four. 1943 I was baptized.

Robert Buckley: You were baptized where?

Mary Schnell: Pardon me?

Robert Buckley: Now, what do you mean by baptism? What does that mean for Jehovah's Witnesses?

Mary Schnell: Oh, it mean, see, now like in other countries when child is born, go to church and was baptized. But with Jehovah's Witnesses it's different because Jesus Christ, when he was on the earth, he said to his disciples: “Go first, teach people and then baptize them.” So baptism is not just to put – be baptized and get the name that you are Christian. But to be baptized it means a dedication of your own will, to do his will and to please him. Did you understand me, what I mean, see? It's just not being connected with water because water is only symbol that you are doing.

[0:35:00] The before you are baptized, you are already dedicated....

Robert Buckley: So you were older then?

Mary Schnell: ... in your heart and you know what you will be doing. It's like signature.

Robert Buckley: So you feel you have to be an adult?

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes, yes.

Robert Buckley: And you were baptized then where because the war was going on. And Jehovah's Witnesses probably you knew were banned, right, as an organization?

Mary Schnell: We were banned, yes.

- Robert Buckley:* And you realized that you were joining a banned religion?
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, I knew. And what for Hitler was enough when he learned that you say, "I am Jehovah's Witnesses." He didn't search are you active or not. You are Jehovah's Witness. So it was very difficult because how could I be baptized and nobody would see me? And we chose the sea, the Baltic Sea.
- Robert Buckley:* Oh so you had to do it secretly?
- Mary Schnell:* Secretly. And the brother took me far away from all people that nobody see me. He said, "When somebody will see you from the distance and, for example German people, then you can be arrested in water, see?"
- Robert Buckley:* So if they saw you going through a baptism ceremony, somebody would tell on you.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, yes.
- Robert Buckley:* Did the Polish people there in your town – would they tell on Jehovah's Witnesses so they would become arrested, so they would get arrested? In other words, would they report?
- Mary Schnell:* No, no. You know why? Because they were afraid of German people and to be involved. They didn't. They were afraid. They were afraid. But I heard that some priests, some priests, they became cooperator. The priests were dangerous, not people. We didn't trust people either because we didn't know which Polish people belong ... stay all the time Polish. Today they are Polish, and tomorrow they are half Polish, half German, so we didn't trust. We didn't trust even some people in the family either because everybody was in fear, in fear, in fear because of this, of this, this of that. And they didn't want to involve and testify against Jehovah's Witnesses because they were afraid. And, generally, Polish people were very enemy of German people.
- Robert Buckley:* So there was a hatred there.
- Mary Schnell:* Very, very hatred.
- Robert Buckley:* So in many cases you came in contact, they wouldn't say anything against you, OK.
- Mary Schnell:* No, no.

Robert Buckley: But now your boss ...

Mary Schnell: Boss, he was German.

Robert Buckley: Ah, your boss was German.

Mary Schnell: Oh, he was from Reich. He was German. He was a real German.

Robert Buckley: So he went and talked to the Gestapo man about you not putting the “Heil Hitler” on there.

Mary Schnell: Oh yes.

Robert Buckley: Now did that get you in trouble then?

Mary Schnell: Pardon me?

Robert Buckley: Did that get you in trouble?

Mary Schnell: Yes, trouble.

Robert Buckley: OK so what was the scenario of events then with that?

Mary Schnell: That I will tell you. That I will tell you, yes. The next day in the morning, in the morning when I came, still I was – before I was warning, before the police came the same morning. And there were the young priests too warning me. “Are you going to listen? Are you going to argue?” He came to see the sister, and he was thinking about me. Maybe he didn’t sleep in the night too *[laughs]*.

I said: “You don’t know what you are talking. You don’t know what you are talking.” And they thought I don’t know what I am doing *[laughs]*. So then finally the doors open. Police come in.

Robert Buckley: This is when you were in the office.

Mary Schnell: Yes. Took me. “Hi.” I went with him. I talked to him. I smiled to the police or soldier. I don’t remember was it soldiers, soldier? At least he was serving Gestapo.

Robert Buckley: Now, were they German?

Mary Schnell: German, German. Oh yes, German. I talked to him. I was like, you know, my neighbor. I talked to him.

[0:40:00]

Robert Buckley: What type of questions did he ask?

Mary Schnell: He has no question. He has no question. He was very formal. I talked to him. He look[ed] at me, sort of look[ed] at me. He could think, 'What she thinks? I am taking her to Gestapo. She's talking to me like my friend or something.' So finally, I came. And then besides, I was not well. I had flu.

Robert Buckley: OK so you went from your office.

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: He took you down to the headquarters?

Mary Schnell: Yes and with fever. This everything I have with this, yes. They saw me [come] to the office, look at me. That nodding head. There were officers, Gestapo, then along the wall, the bench, there was policemen look[ing] at me. Everybody look at me. They didn't wait too long. The drawer – they opened the drawer, put on the desk the declaration for renouncing of your faith. I said no. They started to laugh at me, look at our literature. Then put me very deep in the cell, very deep.

Robert Buckley: They put you in a cell. But just to go back a moment, you said there was a declaration that they wanted you to sign for renouncing your faith?

Mary Schnell: Yeah, my faith.

Robert Buckley: Had you heard about that before?

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes, yes! The brothers told me. The brothers told me that such a thing they are doing, see.

Robert Buckley: So did you read it to say what it said?

Mary Schnell: I didn't read. I was not – you know, for me their explanation was enough when they say this is renunciation of my faith.

Robert Buckley: And what did you tell them?

Mary Schnell: I said: "I cannot do it! No, I cannot do it." So they gave me time. They gave me time. They put me to the cell, yes, very deep without windows, without eating nothing, little bread with water.

- Robert Buckley:* What type of clothing did they give you? Anything to keep your warm?
- Mary Schnell:* Nothing. It was cold, but I didn't feel cold because I had fever, fever. And I don't know how long I was there because it was dark—dark and dark and dark, very small cell. Then one day the door opened and two big Gestapo men came. And I was sitting and the one said, "What you are doing here?"
- I look at them. That's funny question. Don't they see there I am sitting? I said nothing. I didn't answer, didn't give answer. Then I said: "I feel so hot."
- "How many blankets do you have?"
- "One." I had fever, you know, fever. I felt so hot. And they thought that somebody gave me maybe more blankets, you know, and I'm so foolish and tell that I have many blankets so take another [laughs].
- Robert Buckley:* OK so did they interrogate you then? Did they ask you many questions?
- Mary Schnell:* No, no more, no, no, no. They wanted to see Jehovah's Witness, you see. They wanted to see me, how a Jehovah's Witness look[ed]. They come to see me. They want to see how I would behave. I was very young in the truth, and I talked too much about myself, what I am, that I am not worldly, that I serve Jehovah. So when he asked me "What you are doing here?" I said nothing. I thought I don't need to answer. You see I am sitting [laughs].
- Robert Buckley:* Did they – did those men ever try to take advantage of you because you were attractive young person?
- Mary Schnell:* No, no, I don't know attractive. I don't know but no, no, no.
- [0:45:00]
- Robert Buckley:* Because in some cases –
- Mary Schnell:* I was, see, maybe I was pretty maybe proud, see? Proud. When I had to smile, I smiled. **When that done, I was serious. That is someday opened** and I heard when I was in the cell, I heard terrible screaming. I don't know. I think they were beating somebody. It was terrible. That night they took me again upstairs and I came and again put this declaration. I look at it despising. "Sign."

“I told you,” I said.

“Then, girl, no, girl, we cannot help you. You will perish in the camp.”

I thought: ‘What they want to do with me let him do. Leave me alone. Don’t ask me. If you want to send me, send me. Then leave me alone,’ because I was sick too, so I struggled with my strength. And they took me and this day they took me by, yes, by train. They took me by train to Danzig to ... how to say? Chief police high presidium.

Robert Buckley: Now, how many people were on the train with you? What type? Was it a boxcar? Was it – ?

Mary Schnell: Oh, the train? Many people like herrings in barrel [*claps hands repeatedly*].

Robert Buckley: So you went from that town –

Mary Schnell: This was special train, special train with small just, you know, not windows.

Robert Buckley: When was that? Was that in the month of April, May?

Mary Schnell: It was March, March, April.

Robert Buckley: Was it cold?

Mary Schnell: It was cold, yes.

Robert Buckley: Did they have any – ?

Mary Schnell: But in the train it was not cold because it was tight, very tight.

Robert Buckley: Were people sick in there? I heard many people were sick inside those trains. Is that true?

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: Some people even died. Did they have any facilities to go to the toilet?

Mary Schnell: Oh, no, no, no, no.

Robert Buckley: Well, how did people relieve themselves?

- Mary Schnell:* I don't know because I endured, so I don't know. There are many people. Some people have to run in a few minutes or something. I don't know. They were prisoners, prisoners, really prisoners, political prisoners.
- Robert Buckley:* Were there other Jehovah's Witnesses in there?
- Mary Schnell:* No, I was by myself, yes, and full of people, yes, and then –
- Robert Buckley:* Did the other people ask you who you were and did they think maybe you were Jewish or a Gypsy or ...?
- Mary Schnell:* Brother, this was so tight. It was so tight. Nobody ask. It's too tight. Everybody is struggling with his own body.
- Robert Buckley:* Just breathing.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes.
- Robert Buckley:* So there wasn't a lot of conversation.
- Mary Schnell:* Absolutely not. Everybody has his own thought in their mind.
[Taps her temples and crown].
- Robert Buckley:* OK so then you went to Danzig.
- Mary Schnell:* To Danzig.
- Robert Buckley:* So when the train stopped in Danzig, what happened when the doors opened up? Do you remember?
- Mary Schnell:* I don't remember. I know that how I found in this police high presidium. This was police, headquarter police.
- Robert Buckley:* So they took you to Danzig to the headquarters of police?
- Mary Schnell:* Yes with all kinds of chicanes, see, an arrangement and everything.
- Robert Buckley:* No, at that time, you no doubt heard that the Germans were losing the war, yes? Did you understand it at that time that Germany was losing the war in 1944?
- Mary Schnell:* No, I didn't but I believe. I didn't know because who told us? We couldn't listen to the radio. What was in the newspaper was nothing bad. Everything was fine.

[0:50:00] But we believed. We were convinced. While some Germans were convinced they will gain the victory, we were surprised that they were so stupid, see? We believed, we believed.

Robert Buckley: OK so now you were in Danzig in the police headquarters. So how did they treat you there when you got to Danzig?

Mary Schnell: The first thing, the first thing they put me in very deep in dungeon, very deep.

Robert Buckley: By yourself?

Mary Schnell: By myself, see. They separate me from other prisoners, OK. They weren't there. And I thought, 'Well, you will die for sure here. For sure will die.' [It] was dark. Along the wall bench or benches—dark, cold, fever. Thought maybe there are rats here. I don't [know] how long I will stay here. Worse and worse with me. I'm sick. I have fever. I'll die. Well, I die. Someday took me out and placed me on six or seven floor up. And there I found another Witness there. **Hermina**, Hermina **Hirsch**. *[Laughs]*

Robert Buckley: Hirsch, Hermina?

Mary Schnell: Yes, that was her name—nice, nice girl.

Robert Buckley: And how did you feel when you saw her?

Mary Schnell: Oh, I was so happy that I was not the first one and then —

Robert Buckley: How did you know she was one of Jehovah's Witnesses?

Mary Schnell: Because I learned from garden, garden woman. She told me here in another cell there's another Witness. And someday she put me together with Hermina.

Robert Buckley: And were you happy?

Mary Schnell: Yes, I was so happy, so happy. We talk to one another. We sing our songs. She told me what she knew more about concentration camp, what she heard about, and then soon she will go there. And she told me at least when you come to concentration camp, you will enjoy more fresh air because you go to work.

Robert Buckley: And how old was she?

- Mary Schnell:* She was very young. I think about 17 maybe. She was young girl, yes.
- Robert Buckley:* No at that time, did you wear the uniform that they had in the penitentiaries or just your regular – ?
- Mary Schnell:* No, no, not yet. No, no, no. No, this we get in concentration camp.
- Robert Buckley:* OK so now the two of you were together. Now how long did you stay together? And they kept you segregated from the other prisoners? In other words, they wouldn't put you with other prisoners? They just kept Jehovah's Witnesses by themselves?
- Mary Schnell:* No, I was with some – later I was some shortly. I was even with one Jewish lady, Jewish lady. And she said: "How could they put me here? I am Evangelic," she said. "I am no more of Jewish religion," she said. But she was of Jewish nation, so Hitler didn't look. You could be – you could change your religion. But if you were of German nationality, you would be treated like Jewish people. So I don't know where she went. Oh, she was so in despair. So in despair she was.
- Robert Buckley:* Were you able to help her?
- Mary Schnell:* No, I give her witness.
- Robert Buckley:* OK, now how long did you stay in Danzig before you were shipped off?
- Mary Schnell:* Six weeks.
- Robert Buckley:* And how did they treat you in there? Did you get food?
- Mary Schnell:* Food was very, very, very not too much. But the one, she was very rough woman, rough woman.
- [0:55:00] But when she was on her duty, I was not hungry because I was mending the socks of her husband. She was bringing her socks for mending, so I'm mending her socks. So she gave me always more, double portion, so I was [not] hungry, but she was not nice. She was not nice. In the beginning one morning when she came with the breakfast, I was sleeping. She said, "What you are doing here?"
- I said, "I'm sick."
- She said, "You better die!"

‘Oh,’ I said, ‘you cannot tell the truth people. People have no mercy for you. You say the truth and you think they will feel sorry for you, and they treat you in this way.’ So I started to be more brave, you know. *[Laughs]* I have experience and I can advise everybody when you are among bad people and something wrong with you, don’t complain. Don’t tell the truth because they take advantage and can even worsen your situation. So don’t do it.

Robert Buckley: You mean so the other prisoners will take advantage of –

Mary Schnell: No, this is not prisoners. This was the prison guard.

Robert Buckley: Oh, the prison guards.

Mary Schnell: Prison guard, the lady, the woman, yes.

Robert Buckley: So even when you were sick, you had to make believe you weren’t sick.

Mary Schnell: No, no, but I was sleeping. I overslept. She said: “You better die _____! See, better die!”

Robert Buckley: So what type of food did they give you?

Mary Schnell: Soup.

Robert Buckley: Soup?

Mary Schnell: Soup.

Robert Buckley: Coffee?

Mary Schnell: _____ nothing special, not enough.

Robert Buckley: OK so you were there about six weeks.

Mary Schnell: Six.

Robert Buckley: Who else was there besides Jewish people, Jehovah's Witnesses?

Mary Schnell: Not Jewish people. Just Jewish lady was, one who are converted to Evangelic or Protestant religion.

Robert Buckley: Right but she had Jewish blood in her.

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes.

Robert Buckley: OK, what other people were there?

Mary Schnell: Some maybe ... some run from the work. When they are forced to work and they run away, they put them back. And some for political reasons. For example, man who was underground fighting against German and the whole family was put in the prison and then sent to concentration camp.

Robert Buckley: So the whole –

Mary Schnell: All the women and wives and children all together.

Robert Buckley: So if the man was fighting in the underground, the whole family suffered.

Mary Schnell: Yes because also, there was ...

Robert Buckley: OK so you were there for about six weeks.

Mary Schnell: Six weeks.

Robert Buckley: And then you were transported –

Mary Schnell: To concentration camp.

Robert Buckley: And what was the name of that camp?

Mary Schnell: Stutthof. It's close to Danzig.

Robert Buckley: OK and how were you transported from the prison there in Danzig?

Mary Schnell: They put us in van, me and two or three girls for the work—they run away from the work—and some men I think for political reasons.

Robert Buckley: Were you there with Hermina?

Mary Schnell: Oh, no, no. Hermina in the van? No, Hermina was already in headquarter police.

Robert Buckley: So you were sent to Stutthof first or she was sent to Stutthof first?

Mary Schnell: She was sent first.

- Robert Buckley:* So how long were you and this other Witness, Hermina, how long were you together? A week or two?
- Mary Schnell:* Maybe two, three weeks?
- Robert Buckley:* And then she was sent ahead of you.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes because she made her six weeks and then I came six weeks. Probably they were holding people no more than six weeks. This was such a procedure: six weeks and then sending to concentration camp.
- Robert Buckley:* OK and then when you went to Stutthof in the van, how long is that? An hour or two drive?
- Mary Schnell:* Pretty long. I don't know how many hours, but it was tiring, tiring and long.
- [1:00:00]
- Robert Buckley:* OK and then when you got there to Stutthof, you were on the van. And what happened when you got off the van? How did they treat you? What would happen?
- Mary Schnell:* I had to be registered, had to do registered. Went to the registration and they put me on the list. They put me on the list.
- Robert Buckley:* And what was the treatment like when you went to register? What did they do to you?
- Mary Schnell:* Well, see, those people who were involved in the registration were prisoners. And later I learned that among them was a brother too. And the brother – this was the – he wrote letter when he was released. He was branch servant or branch overseer. It means a brother who had oversight over organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. He was Brother Scheider, Wilhelm Scheider, and he noticed me. I didn't notice him because everything was strange for me. So right away all sisters together with Hermina, they knew that I am already in concentration camp.
- Robert Buckley:* She told them ahead of time.
- Mary Schnell:* Brother Scheider, I think, see, the overseer. I think he told. And I brought with myself, with my belongings, I think maybe soap. And the soap was transferred to the sisters already *[laughs]*.

Robert Buckley: Soap?

Mary Schnell: The soap which I brought.

Robert Buckley: You brought bars of soap.

Mary Schnell: Soap, yes.

Robert Buckley: OK.

Mary Schnell: So they understood it belongs to Witnesses. The Witness brought the soap, so let us give to Witnesses so ... *[laughs]* So I was happy to learn that, you see.

Robert Buckley: You mean you brought your own soap along?

Mary Schnell: Yes. Our soap, yes. I had soap, my soap from home and they give the soap, you know, to the sister, to one sister who was very long—maybe five years—in concentration camp. They didn't keep it. They didn't keep it. They gave her as this common belongings, see. Was very nice. I liked it.

Robert Buckley: So the Witnesses would share things like soap.

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes, yes.

Robert Buckley: OK. Now how did they treat you when they – after you went and you signed in, what did they do to you? I understand that they even cut some of the hair off of women?

Mary Schnell: Oh, yes. Now they didn't remove my hair but they put me – I don't know how to say what's this for some disinfection or something? They had such a big barrel, big barrel with some water with oil mixed or something, and everybody had to be immersed until the *[motions up to the neck]*.

Robert Buckley: *[Crosstalk]* And that was to disinfect for lice, bugs, whatever?

Mary Schnell: I don't know. I don't know. Like immersion, you know?

Robert Buckley: Did they do it personally or they do it with a big group of people?

Mary Schnell: No with me personally because I was not big girl, but we were only two or three women, see.

Robert Buckley: Yeah because I understand that in many concentration camps, they would humiliate the women by having them all undress in front of everybody to humiliate them.

Mary Schnell: With Jewish people. With Jewish people they did this.

Robert Buckley: But they didn't do it there in Stuffhof in 19 ...

Mary Schnell: Then besides, I stood before the Polish doctor physician was prisoner. This was under his care and I – they stripped me of all the clothing. Yes, they did, so I felt very embarrassed. I [felt] very embarrassed, and that doctor asked me how is it outside? And I'm ashamed to tell you. I'm ashamed, but I was standing naked.

[1:05:00] And I had to tell him about politician affairs. And I start to give him witness about God's Kingdom. I didn't tell him about politician affairs because I was not interest[ed] about this because it's politician. So I told him that I am Witness and I came here because I believe in the Bible. And I believe that the time will come where God will remove all wickedness from the earth. There will be no more wickedness, no more wars, and God will establish peace here on the earth. And because of this, I was arrested, and before I came here. And he listened.

And what I started to do then there was standing another girl behind me who was assistant of the block elder. The block elder, they was a person who has charge over prisoners but [her]self was a prisoner, and she was not nice. She was not nice. And she went, "Hurry, hurry!" And the doctor said: "Wait, wait, wait. I am listening. I am listening what she is saying." So I finished my witnessing. Then they put me different dress.

Robert Buckley: Did you ever think that you would be explaining your Bible-based beliefs to a man like that standing without any clothes on? Did that ever go through your mind at all?

Mary Schnell: No, no, no, no, no.

Robert Buckley: So then after that, they gave you clothing. What type of clothing? Was it the striped uniform?

Mary Schnell: Striped with purple triangle. How do you say triangle? Triangle, yes, purple triangle.

Robert Buckley: Did they give you a number?

- Mary Schnell:* Was some 27,000. I don't remember. It was 27,000 plus something. But later when Jewish people came, it crossed 100,000, yes, because many, many Jewish people came—many, many Jewish people.
- Robert Buckley:* So then you had your uniform.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes.
- Robert Buckley:* And then where did they put you then?
- Mary Schnell:* Pardon me?
- Robert Buckley:* Where did they place you in the camp at Stutthof?
- Mary Schnell:* Well, there was a complex of barracks, barracks. They were not regular beds. How you say bunk beds with worldly persons. I got one day with lice in my head, but I learned the girl had lice, and I slept with her. And I thought, 'What's wrong with me? What's wrong? Here's some?' [*Pantomimes scratching head and shoulders*] And the sister [*pointing*], "She had lice." Lice—it's very difficult to remove lice, get rid of, and then you can be even beaten when you have lice, but very difficult to get rid.
- Robert Buckley:* So what happened then?
- Mary Schnell:* Well, what happened there was a girl who became later sister. She –
- Robert Buckley:* You mean in the camp she became one of Jehovah's Witnesses?
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, she was of Russian extraction and witnessed to her, and she accepted the truth. And later she learned – she was baptized. So she was very nice to me, and she was so nice girl. And she was taking out with her hands the nits individually here. That's how I get rid of.
- Robert Buckley:* Why would anybody want to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses in the camp and be treated badly to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses?
- Mary Schnell:* Pardon me?
- Robert Buckley:* Why would they want to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses and get treated badly?

Mary Schnell: Oh, you think about this Russian?

Robert Buckley: Yes.

Mary Schnell: Oh, because she learned this is the truth. She learned the truth. This is the truth. She was put in the concentration camp. Yes, she was. First she was taken from Russia to work in the village,

[1:10:00] in the country for German people, and she run away. And for running away, she was put in concentration camp, and she was a sheep. That means she had good heart. She want[ed] to serve God. She loved Jehovah. She was raised in Communistic country. She didn't know God, but she learned. And now I know she's in Ukraine. She's a sister.

Robert Buckley: Do you remember her name?

Mary Schnell: I know her name, first name, Nadya. She's Nadya. But she married. I don't know the second name. Well, I learned only that when she went back to Russia later she was put by Communism and sent to Siberia.

Robert Buckley: Oh, after she was freed.

Mary Schnell: For the truth!

Robert Buckley: After she was freed after the war, then she was – the Communists put her up in Siberia.

Mary Schnell: Yes, to Siberia.

Robert Buckley: Because she was one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Mary Schnell: Oh yes, she was. And she learned her prospective husband there and they came back. Now they're in Ukraine.

Robert Buckley: So now after you met Nadya ...

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: ... and then were you and Nadya and Hermina all put together then? Were all Jehovah's Witnesses then put together finally in Stutthof or were you separated?

Mary Schnell: Yes! No, we were in the same yard. It was a complex [*gesturing expansively*], complex.

- Robert Buckley:* All Jehovah's Witnesses?
- Mary Schnell:* No, not all. Some were ... mostly yes. But in Stutthof we were not many in number. Like, for example, Ravensbrück. In Ravensbrück there was a special for women Witnesses. But Stutthof we were about 20 or more like this.
- Robert Buckley:* OK so you were –
- Mary Schnell:* With worldly people, with other people. We say with worldly people. It means people who are not in the truth.
- Robert Buckley:* I see. So what type of assignment of work did you get? And what type of work did other Jehovah's Witnesses get in the camp?
- Mary Schnell:* I was very good friend of lice, see, all the times *[laughs]*.
- Robert Buckley:* Lice?
- Mary Schnell:* Now not in the head but mending, you know, clothing, **loaded**. They were disinfected but I don't know how there are so many that from the distance you could see when there was some stores and heaps of clothing, they were covered like with salt, peppered salt, and they were nits, nits of this. And mostly I was working in this field.
- Robert Buckley:* Sewing?
- Mary Schnell:* Repairing, repairing, repairing. But one period is special for me. This was nightshift and I worked – I don't know how long I worked. Maybe two weeks, maybe four weeks. But what is the truth is that after ever nightshift, early in the morning I went to the toilet, removed all my clothing and looking for lice, and I found 18 to 20—18 to 20. And I knew where to look at. *[Shows underarm]* 18 to 20 every day, every day.
- Robert Buckley:* Every day.
- Mary Schnell:* I was tired. I was sleepy, but I couldn't go with these livestock to bed after work, see. And then I got sick. It was winter, was winter.
- Robert Buckley:* 1944.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, very cold.

- Robert Buckley:* Now in your barracks, the barracks were made out of wood in Stutthof or stone?
- Mary Schnell:* No, no, was wood.
- [1:15:00]
- Robert Buckley:* Wooden ones. Did they have a heater inside the barracks—heat to keep warm?
- Mary Schnell:* There was one stove, only one stove, but it was very cold, very cold.
- Robert Buckley:* In Auschwitz I know they had heaters, but they wouldn't ever burn anything in them. They just stood there unused.
- Mary Schnell:* We had one such a stove like this. [*Pantomimes rectangular stove*]
- Robert Buckley:* And how many people were in a bunk with you? How many people would they put in a bunk?
- Mary Schnell:* In the bunk, the head, the bed?
- Robert Buckley:* Yes. One person, two?
- Mary Schnell:* Two. So later I started to sleep not head-to-head but head here. [*Gestures downward*]
- Robert Buckley:* Head to toe.
- Mary Schnell:* Toe. It was more space and, because of this [*points to head*], I was afraid.
- Robert Buckley:* The lice, yeah.
- Mary Schnell:* From Polish people. For German people, German people slept by themselves. But I was Polish, us two. And I heard the Russian people on one bunk three. And Jewish people you know how many? Five.
- Robert Buckley:* Did you see the mistreatment of Jewish people? Did you see the mistreatment of political like Russians? Did you see any of that going on in the camp in Stutthof?
- Mary Schnell:* Jewish people?

- Robert Buckley:* Did they mistreat because I heard – ?
- Mary Schnell:* I didn't see too much, but I saw something. I saw something, yes.
- Robert Buckley:* Can you describe that? Do you remember?
- Mary Schnell:* I will try. When I was – this was 1944. I came between March and April. But the same year was in fall. I came early in transport of Jewish of people and I was in hospital. I could see through the window from my bunk many people and since the number crossed 100,000. I don't know of what language they were, but I think they were international, all kinds of people and gathered from this and that camp, but they came pretty well-dressed. But when they came to Stutthof, they stripped off of all what they have good and for example –
- Robert Buckley:* Did they do it right in the open, took all their clothes off?
- Mary Schnell:* Open, open, yes.
- Robert Buckley:* Right in the open.
- Mary Schnell:* Oh, it was very cold—was foggy, cold, moist.
- Robert Buckley:* Right in the open yard they made them take all their clothes off. Was it men and women or all women?
- Mary Schnell:* All together, all together, men, women all together. So I tell you women, women they shaved them, removed them.
- Robert Buckley:* Right in the open in front of everybody.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, yes, yes. Then when they –
- Robert Buckley:* Did the prisoners cut each other's hair or did they have someone from the concentration camp do the haircutting?
- Mary Schnell:* I don't know. I don't know. I know that they removed them, see, and I looked at, see. When they had nice boots, they got something. When they looked worse, it was not so bad. But when they were dressed nicely, then they put just some wrecks. When they were very short, they got very long dresses. When they were very high, then very short just to make fun, you know, make fun.
- Robert Buckley:* They were humiliating them.

Mary Schnell: Yes, humiliated. The same with men, the men. When the men were very short, then they got very long shirt—not pants—shirts. Shirts, you know. When they are very long, they're like this. They felt embarrassed and with that bald and with that hair and skinny and they looked terrible, and then they disappeared. I don't know. And I know there was no contact. There was no contact with them. But I had some contact with some Jewish young girls.

[1:20:00] I prayed to Jehovah that I would like to witness [about] him but how? I've no contact. And someday I got position of overseer [laughs] as my husband mentioned that I will take care of girls. So I had a team of about ten girls. They were two or four weeks. Every day different team came to me. How? Because there was one Jewish woman. She was older—not old—maybe 30, 40. And she was even Polish, so I could speak German. I could speak Polish. She was very nice. I started to witness to her. And someday I wrote a witness in the camp but in secret when everybody was sleeping in the bed in the light of moon and artificial light from the outside. And the next day there was a rumor in the camp that I was writing something against Hitler, something dangerous [laughs]. I tell you, well, I give witness to many Jewish girls.

Robert Buckley: So you explained your Bible beliefs to them.

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes. And the Jewish woman, the Polish, Polish, she tried even to spread this good news among all Jewish girls in the camp. And as she told me that my witness was translated in other languages too. And how they work. They work. They listened. And the guard watch us and said: "What's going on? What they all doing?" but he didn't bother us. But I didn't [come] to work. I came to give them witness.

Robert Buckley: So you were in charge of them. And instead of working, you were talking to them about the Bible.

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: So they weren't doing their work.

Mary Schnell: Well, they did a little bit.

Robert Buckley: But they were listening.

Mary Schnell: Little bit, yes. But they were so interested. You know, I remember the one, they called me "Santa Maria." They called me—I don't

know why—because I had a scarf, you know, here. And I looked maybe like maybe the pictures of Mary in Catholic religion.

Robert Buckley: And since your name was Mary, Santa Maria.

Mary Schnell: Well, they didn't know that I was Mary. My name didn't know, no. They didn't know that. They called me "Santa Maria." They called me, yes. And then one day after this that I wrote something about Hitler, I was dismissed and fired.

Robert Buckley: So you didn't have your job anymore.

Mary Schnell: So I said: "I'm sorry. I'm leaving. I don't come anymore." So they were so sorry. "Oh, ay, ay, ay," I say. Well, then came another girl. The other girl I still was with them together with another girl. And what I noticed right away the girl, not only that she was pushing them to work, started to beat them—beat—slashing the face.

Robert Buckley: And she had come with them, this other woman put in charge?

Mary Schnell: The other instead of me, the other, see, worldly person. Started to beat them, pushed them and beat them. This is the procedure in the camp, see. Like I mentioned this block – how you say?

Robert Buckley: Block elder?

Mary Schnell: Block, block elder.

Robert Buckley: Kapo.

Mary Schnell: Yeah, kapo. She was more than kapo, this. She was leading us and shouting and everything. So they were working hand-in-hand with Gestapo.

[1:25:00] So the young girl who was in charge of the Jewish girls, she was like kapo, sea.

Robert Buckley: What was her background? Was she a political prisoner?

Mary Schnell: I don't know. She was nothing. She was a prisoner.

Robert Buckley: I wondered was she political? Was she a Gypsy?

Mary Schnell: No, no, not Gypsy, no, no. Either she was prostitute, she could be prostitute. She could be for political reasons, and maybe she could be just running away from work.

Robert Buckley: But she was mean though.

Mary Schnell: She could be a prostitute too.

Robert Buckley: Could you tell us what was the day like at Stutthof? What time did your day start? What time did they get you out of bed? What time did they take you to rollcall? Did you have rollcall every day?

Mary Schnell: Seven o'clock we have to stand at attention on the rollcall.

Robert Buckley: Outside?

Mary Schnell: In the morning, seven I think, seven o'clock or maybe six? No, seven I think, seven o'clock after breakfast.

Robert Buckley: All outside.

Mary Schnell: Yes, outside and then to work.

Robert Buckley: Did you eat before that or after rollcall or before rollcall.

Mary Schnell: Before, before. After breakfast we have to stand on the rollcall.

Robert Buckley: Well, what was your breakfast like? What type of food did they serve in 1944?

Mary Schnell: Bread, black coffee and this we get –

Robert Buckley: You say black coffee. Was it good coffee?

Mary Schnell: No, no, the **lower**. And we get this in the morning. In the morning we get one piece of bread and in the evening. And this was for evening and for breakfast.

Robert Buckley: How about lunchtime? Anything for lunch?

Mary Schnell: Lunch, lunch?

Robert Buckley: At noontime did they stop and give you a little food, a little coffee?

Mary Schnell: Well, lunch was a soup, soup. Sometimes I thought, 'Would the dog eat this? I don't know. I am not sure. The pig? Yes, pig is eating everything. Dog is fussy sometimes.'

Robert Buckley: Tell me, I understand that some of the camps, the prisoners had to carry their own cup with them all the time. Did you have to carry

your own cup with you on your side for the eating of your food and drinking of your coffee? Like a bowl, a tin bowl?

Mary Schnell: No but I had rusty ...

Robert Buckley: Bowl?

Mary Schnell: No, rusty spoon, rusty spoon. All the time after eating and before eating, I had to scour it with sand because it was rusty. It was impossible to eat.

Robert Buckley: What did you eat out of though?

Mary Schnell: Pardon me?

Robert Buckley: What did you eat out of? What did they give you to put the food in or your coffee? Did they give you a new cup every day or did you have your own cup?

Mary Schnell: Oh no, it's always the same, all the same. This was a bowl. This wasn't a cup.

Robert Buckley: A bowl.

Mary Schnell: Bowl, such a bowl.

Robert Buckley: And did you keep it on you, on your side or did you put it by your bunk?

Mary Schnell: No, I didn't carry with. No, I think they just give all the time, all the time brought this in so ... once I remember we were standing in the line. This was once a week also. Once a week they give you some slice of like sausage or something. And when the turn was for me, there was blood, lots of it.

Robert Buckley: It was blood sausage.

Mary Schnell: Blood sausage.

Robert Buckley: And you wouldn't eat the blood sausage?

Mary Schnell: No, I didn't eat.

Robert Buckley: Why?

Mary Schnell: Why? Because according to the Bible, blood belongs to Jehovah. And blood is alive and it's against – the Bible says you can eat all kinds of meat. But blood should be removed and poured out on the ground.

Robert Buckley: So you wouldn't eat the blood sausage?

Mary Schnell: No, I wouldn't even do.

Robert Buckley: Would any of Jehovah's Witnesses eat blood sausage?

Mary Schnell: No, no. So when this time come for me, I couldn't make change and take maybe liver sausage or something else because blood

[1:30:00] sausage belonged to me, so I gave to somebody else. Although they knew that this for me it is a sin, they were very glad, and they took and they ate. And I went hungry, and I didn't eat.

Robert Buckley: How did you keep your faith strong? How did the other Witnesses keep their hope up because it would be easy to get discouraged, yes? How did you keep your faith strong?

Mary Schnell: For me it is so like somebody would put in my heart and put the seal and said, "This is so. That is that."

Robert Buckley: So were you able to get together, to pray together, maybe sing songs or study the Bible?

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes. We talk.

Robert Buckley: How? With the Gestapo all over, the SS guards?

Mary Schnell: Well, see, we had little time. It means when we came from work after supper, there was not sleeping time. And we were on the same yard. We were always all together. We worked together, talked together. We sing together. I remember once we started to sing. We stopped to sing and then started to sing other. Women, their church song, and Gestapo lady, Gestapo lady. She said – but she was not so bad – was young. I don't know, Gestapo maybe. She was not Gestapo but she was there. "You stop! Let Witnesses sing!" She liked our singing. And you know how church people sing—always the same. They say: "Please have mercy. Please have mercy." And all the time, "Please have mercy." And they start to pray rosary, rosary, the same and the same and the same. And this is against the Bible. The Bible says Jesus Christ said we should not

pray like this, all the same and all the same and all the same,
because Jehovah will not listen to us because it makes no sense.

Robert Buckley: What were some of the songs that you sang? Do you remember?
Can you remember?

Mary Schnell: You know, this song, this song, Witnesses.

Robert Buckley: Can you sing Song 129?

Mary Schnell: I could sing but I lost my voice. I can't sing.

Robert Buckley: How does it go? [*Begins humming*]

Mary Schnell: I lost my – I cannot sing here now. I had some problem with my
sickness in my chords. How to say? See, I forget words.

Robert Buckley: That's OK. That's the vocal chords?

Mary Schnell: Vocal chords broke. I cannot sing, and I like so much to sing.

Robert Buckley: Tell me, what was the worse experience that you can remember?
Would you like to share that, the way you were treated? Do you
remember anything?

Mary Schnell: In concentration camp?

Robert Buckley: In Stutthof or to any other Jehovah's Witnesses. Do you remember
anything?

Mary Schnell: Well, there are many, many, many Witnesses but many case but I
don't know.

Robert Buckley: Did you ever think that you were going to survive? Did it go
through your mind? Did you think that maybe you'll never
survive?

Mary Schnell: I didn't think too much about it, no. I was ready to die. I was ready
to die. And I think if I would think that I should survive, then I
hope I will survive. It would be maybe too long to me, and my
mind would be too much occupied with this thing. The main thing
was for me just to endure, to endure.

Robert Buckley: Now, when did you know the war was coming to an end? Did you
have any idea that the war was getting close to an end now because
1944? Now it turned to 1945.

[1:35:00]

Mary Schnell: I didn't mention this. We had two evacuations. First evacuation was in January 1945, and they transferred us to Danzig. And it looks like –

Robert Buckley: By truck?

Mary Schnell: No.

Robert Buckley: Train?

Mary Schnell: No, by ...

Robert Buckley: Walking?

Mary Schnell: No. By train but open train, by open train like –

Robert Buckley: In January?

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes and night. Before then, we were sleeping [in] the snow in January before they loaded us on the train, the train open like the open train like for goods, you know, like for goods—close you see. It looks like – I don't know. It looks like the destination was to place where the boat was waiting for us. And there was talking that they wanted to drown us, to drown us. But you know what happened? Before we get to Danzig, there was a terrible bombardment about 24 hours. And we were standing in the field before entering Danzig. So this transport failed, so they just put us in ... how to say? _____. I forgot.

Robert Buckley: That's OK so you went to Danzig?

Mary Schnell: And we stayed there six weeks doing nothing, just staying and coming. After six weeks, we came back to concentration camp.

Robert Buckley: Stutthof.

Mary Schnell: And when we came to concentration back, the same day the concentration camp started to be bombarded, and prisoners were standing on the rollcall some wounded. Even kapos were wounded. And hospital, hospital was full with wounded from air raids.

Robert Buckley: Air raids.

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes.

Robert Buckley: So now you knew the war was getting close to an end.

Mary Schnell: Something was crazy, started to be crazy. And then in May we started with second and the last evacuation.

Robert Buckley: And where were they taking you?

Mary Schnell: They took us back to Polish territory, which there was German, close to my house and there ...

Robert Buckley: Is this where they put you on the barge or the boat?

Mary Schnell: Yes, before. Yes, before barge. One night we spent in the woods, and some died—couldn't make it.

Robert Buckley: You mean some of Jehovah's Witnesses or some of the prisoners?

Mary Schnell: No, no, there was one Russian woman who very stuck to me, very liked me, and she wanted always to be with me and sometimes when she was hungry, she came to me and cried like little baby that she's hungry. And I would have to watch what I would give her and she – I left her in the woods.

Robert Buckley: She died.

Mary Schnell: She couldn't. She looked so bad and "Mary!" she said, "Mary." I look at her. I couldn't help her.

Robert Buckley: Yeah, you couldn't hardly help yourself.

Mary Schnell: And she died. And what I saw, I saw one soldier was hanging on the tree.

Robert Buckley: He hung himself?

Mary Schnell: I don't know. Maybe he was executed, maybe. I don't know because they were the last crazy days.

Robert Buckley: Now when did they put you on a barge I understand?

Mary Schnell: Next day in the morning. Next day after sleeping this in the night in the woods.

Robert Buckley: They put you on a barge. Now, why did they put you on a barge?

Mary Schnell: Why? I don't know why? I couldn't believe.

Robert Buckley: Was it a big barge? How many people?

[1:40:00]

Mary Schnell: I don't know—full. It was full up and down, mostly on the bottom to form ballast. Otherwise, the barge could overturn. We came on the top.

Robert Buckley: Now, this was up in the North Sea.

Mary Schnell: Yes, like this: had here, had here sloping. [*Pantomimes sloping roof*]

Robert Buckley: So they were taking you out in the barge and what were they going to do with the barge?

Mary Schnell: They didn't tell us, but we didn't expect anything good because we heard they were drowning people. When I saw this first time, I look at the sister. The sister, she was about 65. I said: "What? We cannot go out on this piece." She look at me, and I stopped to talk and let me climb, all right. [*Throws up hands*]

Robert Buckley: So what happened then?

Mary Schnell: What happened?

Robert Buckley: How did you get off the barge?

Mary Schnell: Well, we went. We get on the barge. We didn't stay too long because the barge was in very bad shape. And the plan which they had was still not in the right line, so we changed another barge.

Robert Buckley: So we got off of that barge onto another barge?

Mary Schnell: Yes and the other barge someday was again no good. And then they sent some – saving, saving, saving boats and started to throw away belongings from the bags of the women, not from us. And they said: "Witnesses first." Oh, then Witnesses went first.

Robert Buckley: They permitted the first Witnesses to get off?

Mary Schnell: Off.

Robert Buckley: Why?

- Mary Schnell:* It's a privilege because it was very dangerous, very dangerous and they turned, turned the barge in meantime maybe? *[Laughs]*
- Robert Buckley:* Now who was in charge of the barge that they permitted the Witnesses to get off first?
- Mary Schnell:* Because it was very dangerous who would go first; was go first. And then we went first and from the other women were many women they took out their belongings from the bags and put it in water.
- Robert Buckley:* They threw them in the water.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, yes. And then we found another two brothers who were released from concentration camp, and they were very sick from typhus, but still they can walking. They just walking *[rocking from side to side]*. And I was afraid when they were transferred from one to another that they would fall in the water, but somehow they didn't. One was Brother Walter, Walter. He was sometime in *Awake!* Did you read Brother Walter's ... and then we got on the third. When we were on the third, it was much talking.
- Robert Buckley:* You were on a third barge?
- Mary Schnell:* Already on the third. Much talking that this barge is destined to be drowned, so there was no movement. People were afraid. Some were on watch. When it was very dangerous, they would leave the barge. But finally they didn't watch. They didn't wait for some special warning, but they did = just left the barge.
- Robert Buckley:* So they put the people on it and then everybody in charge left, so the prisoners were free.
- Mary Schnell:* They just left.
- Robert Buckley:* So the prisoners got off and left.
- Mary Schnell:* And we stayed.
- Robert Buckley:* You stayed on the barge.
- Mary Schnell:* We stayed even for sisters. They left too and they went. And then one sister told me: "Join us." I said: "No." "Join us," she said. "They want to drown us."

[1:45:00]

- Robert Buckley:* So you decided to stay.
- Mary Schnell:* I said to myself, to nobody, 'If Jehovah allows, allows us to drown, he will help us to endure and we will make it. We will make it.'
And we made it because there was a captain. I'll tell you about this captain. There [was] captain who – not who, Sister **Malenko**, Sister Malenko, I mentioned in my report Sister Malenko. Hermina, Hermina, she was our little girl, good health. She join her too. And Sister Malenko every day witnessed to this captain. The captain listened, listened. And he told her – admitted that this barge, he get order to drown.
- Robert Buckley:* So he was going to sink the boat, sink the barge.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes. But he would not do it.
- Robert Buckley:* So how many people were on the barge at that time maybe?
- Mary Schnell:* Not too many.
- Robert Buckley:* Most of them had left.
- Mary Schnell:* Oh yes, not too many.
- Robert Buckley:* Because the guards were gone.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes.
- Robert Buckley:* So the captain admitted that.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes. He said he is guilty of 12 brothers who [were] put in prison because they were Witnesses, but he did wrong thing.
- Robert Buckley:* So he's apologizing for that.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, what he did. And now he believes that Jehovah helped him, that he will bring us in the hand, for example, English people. They hang their white flag as expression of ...
- Robert Buckley:* Surrender?
- Mary Schnell:* Surrender.
- Robert Buckley:* And he took the barge where then?

Mary Schnell: Yes and someday he may decided to move and he moved. And besides, he said, never in his life he saw such a peace, such a vessel like this going in the sea. He would never do it, but now he will do it because this vessel was completely like powder and full of mines, surrounded by mines.

Robert Buckley: Mice?

Mary Schnell: Mines, mines.

Robert Buckley: Oh, mines.

Mary Schnell: Yes, mines. And then when he started, when he moved, the next day the morning, there was a capitulation. It was May of 1945. '45? Yeah, '45, May and Danish people.

Robert Buckley: So he took you over to Denmark?

Mary Schnell: Yes, Denmark.

Robert Buckley: And they helped you there?

Mary Schnell: Oh yes. We were contacted with brothers, brothers, soon with brothers. And we stayed with brothers about 10 months. I was 10 months with brothers. We had very fine time. We learned Danish.

Robert Buckley: Danish language?

Mary Schnell: Little bit. I translated about nine *Watchtowers* from Danish to Polish, not too good. We had some – that we have some orientations. What about an everyday daily text?

Robert Buckley: So how did you meet your husband because I understand he's a concentration camp survivor from Auschwitz.

Mary Schnell: Yes, I didn't know my husband and there wasn't – there'd come a time to go home, to go home. The Polish, Polish authorities sent us letter, gave us time and place where to go. And I was thinking, 'Hmm, when I go to Poland, I have to work. I must have – I have to find good work. I know little German. Maybe I may use Danish. Who knows? I was very ambitious. I don't know how – why. I don't know. So I earn more money so I can help my parents. My mother's sick. When I was thinking then the day before I left

[1:50:00] Denmark, I got the letter from this brother who has charge over organization.

Robert Buckley: In Germany?

Mary Schnell: Yes, Brother Scheider. He wrote me letter that I can work in Bible House.

Robert Buckley: Oh, the German branch office.

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes. We say Bethel, Bethel.

Robert Buckley: Now, I understand that this is a picture of you in 1945?

Mary Schnell: '45?

Robert Buckley: Why don't you hold it up to the camera? Hold it up here. Let's take a look.

Mary Schnell: Oh my! Hermina will ... she will recognize me.

Robert Buckley: OK so that picture was taken just after the war.

Mary Schnell: Yes, yes. Yes, while I came to Bethel. But before I came to Bethel, I observed this Bethel in Denmark and I visited brothers there a lot. So, well, they work for just little allowance. Well, what I need more? I don't need more. I would like to live – so when I got there, it was according to my heart, what I wanted. I like it.

Robert Buckley: So you stayed at the German branch office for –

Mary Schnell: Branch, four years.

Robert Buckley: Four years.

Mary Schnell: Four years and soon was the branch banned by Communists. They arrested us and my husband –

Robert Buckley: So you were arrested then by the Communists?

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: That would be about 1949?

Mary Schnell: '50.

Robert Buckley: '50.

Mary Schnell: Almost '50. I stayed about one year and Victor two, my husband two years. And when we married, I was just few months married, and we were imprisoned.

Robert Buckley: You were imprisoned now behind the Iron Curtain.

Mary Schnell: Yes and I saw him after two years.

Robert Buckley: So you were married and then you were split up because you went to one prison, and he went to another prison behind the Iron Curtain.

Mary Schnell: Yes.

Robert Buckley: Well, why didn't the Communists permit you to exercise your belief? Why didn't they like Jehovah's Witnesses?

Mary Schnell: Because we telling the truth. Communist is [un]godliness, [un]godly people. They don't believe in God.

Robert Buckley: Oh, godless.

Mary Schnell: They're godless people. And we talk about God Jehovah and Jesus Christ. And we say the time will come that this earth will be changed into paradise. And Jehovah through Jesus Christ will overall completely the earth, and He will be our ruler. And Communists, they consider themselves as kings and rulers. And by telling such a thing like this, it's like telling against them that they are such like this.

Robert Buckley: So then what prison were you put into then in the communist lands? Where you in a jail, a prison, penitentiary?

Mary Schnell: How to say ...

Robert Buckley: Detention camp?

Mary Schnell: No.

Robert Buckley: What was the name of it?

Mary Schnell: Security, security.

Robert Buckley: Where at? Where?

Mary Schnell: The first was in Warsaw. This was the head security and then local.

- Robert Buckley:* And how were you able to get out of Poland then?
- Mary Schnell:* How?
- Robert Buckley:* How did you get out to get to the western?
- Mary Schnell:* Well, see, my husband, he has all family in Australia. He wanted to go to Australia, but they didn't want to put him. We were under a blacklist. And someday—I don't know—somehow—I don't know. I had such an idea to go to American Embassy. I don't remember, but I know what pushed me. It was close to the security when we were going and asking. Then I found somebody. Somebody said: "You are born in America. You can go back to America."
- I said: "Back to America? I married a man. He is not from America."
- [1:55:00] And then some people said: "See, I am in military year. And my parents are born in America, and I can go."
- So then I went to embassy, and the officer of embassy, she said: "You belong to us. You are American girl. So you make declaration, sign these papers and everything. But you have to wait about one year." So I went one year.
- Robert Buckley:* So because you were born in America, you were able.
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, I went. So when I went after one year, I put papers in passport office, and suddenly I got passport. I couldn't believe. I worked in the office. I read, I read. I couldn't believe. It's Polish. I couldn't believe—in few weeks.
- Robert Buckley:* So then when you came to – you got together with your husband. And when you came to America, you came to what – ?
- Mary Schnell:* To me. No, the consul[ate] said: "To whom your husband's going? To whom?" I didn't know what to say. "To you?" I said yes.
- Robert Buckley:* OK so when you came to America, where'd you go? To New York?
- Mary Schnell:* Yes, I went to New York because, first of all, I want to be close to headquarter[s] of Jehovah's Witnesses was my sentiment, see, close. There was one brother who was sometime. He was missionary in Poland, in Poland. Then later her was in Bethel. We wrote when we were in Germany on the way, see. And we thought

he was still in Bethel, but somehow he married, but he got this letter. So we didn't know when we came. We landed in New York, and we landed, who is standing? The brother with his wife and other brother, and our belongings, everything was checked.
[laughs]

Robert Buckley: So they took care of you.

Mary Schnell: Then I said: "I don't worry where I will sleep. I don't worry. I go to nobody. I go to the Kingdom Hall in the night. I sleep in the night. In the morning I get up."

Robert Buckley: So you went to New York, and how long did you stay in New York?

Mary Schnell: Not too long, not too long because soon there was assembly.

Robert Buckley: And from there you moved to where, to North Carolina?

Mary Schnell: Then from the assembly, sister took me for two weeks to Mount ... oh my. Two weeks I was in Massachusetts and two weeks I was in other state. And then I came back, came back to my husband. My husband meantime he got the job. And then we moved to New Jersey, and we stayed several months before winter came; was difficult, the transport. Then we moved to New York, and in New York we lived pretty long—maybe eight years or something. But still, I like to live where it's more like in the village in the country because I like the nature. I am romantic woman.

Robert Buckley: So you moved to North Carolina then?

Mary Schnell: Yes and I like here.

Robert Buckley: So how long have you lived in Cary? This is Cary, North Carolina, right?

Mary Schnell: Twenty-five years.

Robert Buckley: Twenty-five years. You have a beautiful home.

Mary Schnell: Yes, two years ago, we met our brothers in Poland. Some still are very old and in new Bethel. The coordinator is our old friend. The time he was a young pioneer or district overseer. He married a girl, and everybody was just thinking, 'Mary is coming! Will we recognize her after over 30 years and one sister who is 70?' But

[2:00:00] when they saw me, they recognized me. And one brother, I don't know if he knew I would come, he saw me.
He came: "Mary! Mary?"

 I said: "Who are you? Take off your glasses. I cannot recognize you." I couldn't recognize him. He recognized me. So everybody was happy.

Robert Buckley: Everybody could recognize you.

Mary Schnell: Somebody made many hours by car to come just to see us.

Robert Buckley: How nice! Nice to have friends like that. What happened to your mother and your father? May I ask that? Did they survive the war?

Mary Schnell: My mother – yes, yes. My mother was about ten years sick. She started with change of life, then other. Then she couldn't walk. She cried. Then she felt little better. Then finally maybe it was flu and lost her weight. [It] lasted altogether ten years. My father, he was baptized, was baptized. He died when he was 93. We wanted to bring him here, but he said he's too weak. He cannot—too weak.

Robert Buckley: So he died in Poland.

Mary Schnell: Died in Poland. The younger sister, she never learned the truth. She was baptized, but she should not be. She was rather opposer.

Robert Buckley: Let me ask you do you have any children of your own?

Mary Schnell: No.

Robert Buckley: No children.

Mary Schnell: I don't know if I will have. If I survive, I will. If not ... I talk about this. If I not, then I will not have children because those who are resurrected will not marry, so maybe I will be babysitter. I come by children, play with them. And when we live everlasting life, the children. But still I hope I will in Bethel.

Robert Buckley: Well, I'd like to thank you for your very interesting experience. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum would like to express its appreciation to you, Mary.

[End of Recording]