

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Mary Hermanowski
August 19 2013
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PREFACE

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MARY HERMANOWSKI
August 19, 2013

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mrs. **Mary Hermanowski**, on August 19th, 2013, in **Jamaica, Queens, New York**.

Answer: Yes.

Q: Thank you, Mrs. **Hermanowski**, for agreeing to speak with us today. It's late in the day, but we are thrilled that we're still going to have an opportunity to talk.

A: Great. I'm happy.

Q: Okay, so – **[break]** All right, so I'm going to start the interview like I did with your husband's, a little earlier. Could you tell me when you were born – your date of birth, that is; where you were born; and your maiden name?

A: Ah, July 11th, 1930 what?

Q: 1930?

A2: One.

Q: Or 1931?

A: Thirty-one.

Q: 1931.

A: In **Poznan**.

Q: In **Poznan, Poland**.

A: **Poland**.

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Q: And what was your name at birth?

A: Well, it was spelled in Polish.

Q: Please –

A: **Maria Ludwiga** –

Q: **Ludwiga**.

A: **Szrajer**.

Q: **Szrajer**?

A: Right. **S-z-r-a-j-e-r**.

Q: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: No.

Q: You were the only child.

A: Yes.

Q: Oh. And what was your mother's name?

A: **Ionnina(ph) Landowska(ph)**.

Q: **Landowska(ph)** –

A: Right.

Q: – was her maiden name.

A: Right.

Q: Do you remember when she was born?

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A: She was born – oh my God.

A2: 1898.

Q: 1898? Is that what the year would be?

A: Where do we have that information?

Q: It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, we have it in our documents, I'm just asking now, so that I get an orientation while we begin the interview, at the beginning.

Your father, what was his name?

A: His name was **Ludwig**.

Q: **Ludwig**.

A: But in – on this side of the **Atlantic**, he was **Louis**.

Q: **Louis**, okay. So in Polish he would be **Ludwig**, and his name was **Szrajer**.

A: Right.

Q: Are they both from **Poznan**, your parents?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: My father was from **Lódz**, and my mother was from **Warsaw**.

Q: And you grew up in **Poznan**?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Can you tell me, what was your first language at home?

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A: I'm sure it's Polish, but French was there, pretty close.

Q: So we use bilingual, French and – and – and Polish?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was your father's profession?

A: My father had a business –

Q: Okay.

A: – ran a business. He – everybody thought he was a lawyer. He – he was a graduate of the **Moscow Conservatory**, in piano. And what a – there's one other thing.

A2: He was going to **Polytechnic**.

A: But he never finished the **Polytechnic**, it didn't work. No, he had – he was crazy about cars.

Q: Okay, mm-hm. He was – so your father had his own business?

A: Yep.

Q: What was the business in?

A: Export import.

Q: Was it ma – was it consumer products?

A: Yes. I think it was almost exclusively threads.

Q: And did he – did he have his own store, or did he sell to stores –

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A: No, no, no, he had an office, and he would deliver, send packages.

Q: And your mother? She helped him in the business, or not?

A: Yes.

Q: She did. She helped him.

A: My mother was – before she married, she worked in a bank, and she had this right of signature, for the bank. And then, she helped him. My mother was an unusual character.

Q: Tell me in what way.

A: Now I realize how extremely bright she was. Very determined. She knew what she wanted, and God forbid I – I wouldn't do exactly what she wanted. But, our son considers her his mother. He loved – he – when she died, he sat crying, said I lost my mother.

Q: She wa – he was that –

A: He loved her, and she loved him. So, she was a **[indecipherable]**

Q: Well, that's – that's beautiful, because there aren't – there are many children who aren't – don't know their grandparents well, and to have a grandparent who was such an important part of your life, is a true gift. How was she with you? Were you frightened of her, when you – she wouldn't – you wouldn't do – or was she your best friend?

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A: She was – she was not my best friend, right, **Wojczus**(ph)?

Q: Well, I guess what I'm trying to establish is, what kind of relationship did you have with your parents; with your father, and with your mother?

A: She was the one issuing orders, and I better listen. And my father was my pal, and my father was trying to make up for the fact that I was an only child. So he tried to be a f – a friend, you know, a playmate.

Q: Were you able to confide in him?

A: Yes.

Q: So you – any kind of troubles you had, any kind of thoughts or secrets –

A: I went to him.

Q: You went to him, okay.

A: A typical daughter-father relationship.

Q: Yeah. Were you parent – tell me, what religion were your parents?

A: They were – my mother was Roman Catholic, my father was – what do you call it? Neither. Nothing.

Q: He was – he was agnostic?

A: Agnostic.

Q: He was agnostic.

A: Yeah.

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Q: Was your father – were your father and mother both from, originally, Catholic families?

A: No.

Q: So tell me about that.

A: My father was originally from a Jewish family, and so was my mother.

Q: I see. But she actually converted?

A: But then – no, her father, or even before that. The conversion happened much earlier.

Q: For her.

A: Yeah.

Q: For her. Okay. Into Roman – and for him? For your fa –

A: For him? He was an agnostic, he – he didn't care.

Q: But his gra – I-I'm asking about your grandparents, were they practi –

A: I don't know them, I don't know what's going on.

Q: I see.

A: And neither did he.

Q: I see. So, you didn't know your grandparents very well.

A: N-No. The only grandparents I – parent I knew, was my mother's father.

Q: I see.

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A: That was the only one I knew, and we were the biggest buddies in the world.

Q: Did he spoil you?

A: Oh, yeah. As much as he could.

Q: Okay, okay. What do you remember from your childhood in **Poznan**? Do you have an earliest memory?

A: I remember my wonderful room, with all this – I remember how the furniture was arranged, I remember I had – well, you see, my father's relatives had a toy factory. So I always got all these dolls, and I didn't like dolls, I never played with dolls. I played with games. And – so I had a – a beautiful shelf, and I had a – that particular room had a terrace, small terrace. So I had a door to the terrace, which in the winter was covered with a pretty heavy felt –

Q: Ah, yeah.

A: – because was cold. But I had – oh, what do you call them? The – what – what they used to use to warm a place.

Q: You mean those coal ovens?

A: The – the – the – but they – they were not coal, no, they – they were made out of – what? No **[indecipherable]**.

Q: Oh, oh, I – they were ove – they were ovens that had tiles –

A: Yes –

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Q: – those type.

A: – tiled all the way up –

Q: And down. And then that's –

A: – and down. And on the bottom you –

Q: You put the coal in.

A: – coal in.

Q: Yeah.

A: And it was very pretty, and it was white and blue, and stuff was nice.

Q: So, you had a pretty room.

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of a house did your parents live in? Was it an apartment building?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Wa-Was it in the center of town?

A: No.

Q: Okay. It was in a residential area of **Poznan**.

A: It was a residential area.

Q: Was it a large apartment?

A: The apartment –

Q: Yeah.

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A: – itself, had seven rooms

Q: That's rather large.

A: You bet.

Q: Yeah. And did anybody else live with your family besides yourself and your mother and your father?

A: Yes, we had the **[speaks Polish]**

Q: A maid? Or a –

A: A maid. A maid, a cook, all in one person.

Q: A housekeeper.

A: A housekeeper.

Q: A housekeeper, you had a housekeeper. Would you say that your family was well-to-do?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, okay. So materially, you didn't ever feel a lack for either food, or – or clothing, or toys, or anything like that?

A: Nope.

Q: Okay.

A: A lack of things only if my mother decided I shouldn't have it, then I didn't get it.

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Q: Got it.

A: That's the only way.

Q: Well, what about friends? One of the hard things for only children is to – did you have cousins to play with, or neighborhood kids?

A: No, I didn't have cousins, I had – first of all, there was a park, right there where we lived. So I went to that park every day, and I had a pair of twins, who were my age, but they were bigger, and taller, and everything. I have pictures of them, it – it's so funny. They were my bosom pals. I had the – a couple of girls, girlfriends, too. But I always had somebody to play with.

Q: Yeah, okay. And – and they were neighborhood kids?

A: Yeah, pretty much.

Q: And tell me a little bit about school. How many years of schooling did you have in the 1930s?

A: Two.

Q: Only two. You finished two classes –

A: I was all – I was only – 30 – I was eight years old when the war started. So, I was six, I went to grade one, was seven I went to –

Q: Grade two.

A: – grade two, and I was about to start grade three.

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Q: Were your parents – was it a – a private school, or a –

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, what kind of school? Was it a Catholic school, for example?

A: Yes.

Q: And why were you sent to a Catholic school?

A: Because it had an excellent reputation.

Q: Was your mother very religious?

A: No.

Q: Okay. So she identified herself as a Catholic, but she wasn't very practicing.

A: No.

Q: And your father was neutral –

A: New – that's right.

Q: – completely neutral. Do you have any memories of those first couple years in school?

A: Oh yes.

Q: What was it like?

A: I remember the buildings, but I have pictures of them –

Q: Okay.

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A: – more recent. I remember that the first class teacher, she was kind of short and smiley and pleasant.

Q: Did you –

A: They're pleasant memories, very pleasant.

Q: Did you like going to school, then?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Because you see, my aim in life was to have higher education.

Q: Even at age eight, you knew that this is what you wanted?

A: Yep.

Q: Were there certain subjects that were your favorite subjects?

A: Yes.

Q: What would have that been?

A: Math.

Q: Math. At home, what was the atmosphere like at home?

A: Very pleasant.

Q: Your parents got along?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Okay. It was a love match?

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A: Yes.

Q: And did they talk about the wider world with you? I mean, you were a child. Or did you hear conversations?

A: Well, I think – I – that I don't remember that well, but I think there were – there was talk about this kind of stuff at the dinner table.

Q: Between them, about politics?

A: Well, they let – they let me take part in it.

Q: Oh, they did?

A: Yeah.

Q: So in some ways they treated you like a grown-up?

A: Yep.

Q: Did they talk about **Poland's** leaders? Were they very patriotic people?

A: I should say yes, yes.

Q: Why do you – why would you hesitate a little bit?

A: Because I – later on, I kept telling my father, why the hell didn't you leave, why didn't you move? You knew what was going to happen. But they wouldn't do it.

Q: You said that they were not born in **Poznan**, yes?

A: No.

Q: Okay. What had caused them to move there?

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A: A relative. A relative that I remember my father telling me that a relative, when he was – he came back from **Russia** after World War –

Q: One.

A: – one, found himself completely cleaned out of anything he possessed. The relatives beautifully left him noth – with nothing. And the relative told him to move to **Poznan**, it's a good place to start a business, and that he was going to help him, which he indeed, did.

Q: Okay. Was this an uncle, or a distant – did you know the person?

A: Yes, I was familiar with the person, yeah.

Q: Okay. Because it sounds like you didn't know many of your relatives, outside of your grandfather.

A: No, I did, because my father was friends with a lot of relatives, so I knew two or three of his cousins, I knew a couple of his – his friends. I knew people.

Q: And were they – I'm sorry that I emphasize and keep going back to this, but were they Jewish, or were they Catholic?

A: They were both. They were this – this and this.

Q: Okay, so they were mixed marriages.

A: Mixed, yeah.

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Q: But did they all consider themselves assimilated into Polish society? Did they consider themselves Poles, as well as –

A: Poles, rather than Polish society.

Q: Okay, they considered themselves Poles.

A: Polish, they were Polish. **[phone ringing]**

Q: Okay, let's break for a second. **[break]**

A: Yeah, my father was crazy about cars.

Q: Did you have a car at home?

A: Oh yeah. He had, I think, his driver's license was number seven, or something like that. After wo –

Q: For the city.

A: No, no, no, for **Poland**.

Q: Oh my God.

A: After World War I.

Q: Oh my God, he really did like cars.

A: Yes. And he traveled – well, he used them for business, but he belonged to the automobile club, and he used to take part in rides.

Q: Oh my.

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A: He – just before the war, he won the biggest Polish ride like that. It was from the southeast corner to the northwest corner.

Q: Like from **Zamosc** to **Gdynia**?

A: No, from **Zaleszczyki** to **Gdynia**, yes.

Q: Wow. I wonder how many hours that took.

A: That probably took something around 20.

Q: Now when –

A: And he took with him, his brother-in-law.

Q: Your mother's sister – your mother's brother?

A: No, your – my mother's brother-in-law, who's an idiot. But I don't know why he took him, I have no idea. But, he didn't spoil the whole thing, which was the main – which was important. But then he – he took me for most of the local things.

Q: Did you like riding with him?

A: Oh. A-And he let me win most of them.

Q: So, were these races, or car – I mean, were these the things –

A: Rallies, they called them rallies.

Q: I see. Would – did you win according to speed, or according to –

A: No, according to what I found.

Q: Oh, so it was along the way, you would find markers of some kind.

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A: Yeah, there was something up in the tree, or there was something someplace else, or there was a – a – some sort of a house that didn't belong there. You know, something like that.

Q: Well, it sounds like great fun.

A: Yes.

Q: Did your mother ever take part?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: My mother was not interested in that. My mother went to get a new dress made while we did – while we did that.

Q: Okay. So, they talked about – they talked about important things, and serious things at home?

A: Oh yes. **[phone ringing]**

Q: Okay. **[break]**

A: What did you do to your finger?

Q: Nothing, I'm just holding it.

A: Oh.

Q: Okay. So they talked about serious and important things to you. Did they –

A: Yes, they did.

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Q: Did you have any sense of the nervousness that so many people had at the end of the 1930s? Did you have any sense, even being a small child, that – that there was this place called **Germany** to the west, and **Soviet Union** to the east?

A: All I know is that a week before September, I guess –

Q: 1939, mm-hm.

A: – my father packed us up, and we drove to **Warsaw**, where his sister lived.

Q: And –

A: His sister he couldn't stand, but – but being a gentleman, he – he never threw her out of the house. But he used to give her such a hard time. She [**indecipherable**].

She wanted to know what he was going to do with her, or something, when they came back from **Russia** after World War I. He said, no problem, I'll put you in the post office on a chair, you will stick out your tongue, and people will wet their st – wet their stamps. That was my father, with his sister.

Q: I don't know if she would have appreciated that humor. Did she?

A: Yes, because she considered that as an expression of love. She did that all the time.

Q: So di – was – wa – did you like her?

A: No.

Q: And why not?

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A: She was stupid. Very stupid.

Q: But the place that you moved to in **Warsaw**, was that her house, or a family house, or a family apartment?

A: No, I don't – I think we were in a hotel, or something.

Q: I see.

A: I don't know – I don't know if it was her place or not. She had a daughter, and the daughter was a pain in the neck all her life. Fortunately she's gone already, so I should not be too nasty about her. I love **Warner(ph)**, her oldest son. We're big friends.

Q: So, because she lived though, in **Warsaw**, your father decided to move there, is that right? Or to just go there –

A: No, this was just as an emergency measure, before we – that I think he realized he has to go east, and that was the way to go.

Q: Oh, I see. So – so, did you think that you'd be returning back to **Poznan**, or not?

A: I don't think I even gave it a thought.

Q: What were your parents – did they seem particularly agitated, or – or this was just normal kind of, well, one time we go here, another time we go there?

A: No, they were quite upset.

Q: Okay. How did that show itself?

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A: Discussions.

Q: Okay. They were nervous.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Do you remember where you were when the war broke out?

A: I think we were – we e – we were either in **Warsaw**, or we were already traveling east.

Q: So you only stayed a little bit in **Warsaw**, you didn't stay long.

A: No.

Q: I see. And did they give – did your father give you any reason why you would have traveled east, rather than stay in **Poznan**?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Okay. Okay. Where did you eventually end up?

A: **Lwów**, in **Lwów**.

Q: And did you go by one of – did you go by his car that he used to go into –

A: Well, he lost his car, it was taken away from him at a certain point.

Q: Before you –

A: The Russians took – took it away.

Q: After you got to **Lwów**, or before you got to **Lwów**?

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A: Before. We were trying to get through to **Lithuania** [phone ringing] but on the way –

Q: Hang on. Why were you trying to get to **Lithuania**? Do you remember what –

A: To get to **Sweden**, to get to the west.

Q: I see. As a transit route.

A: Yes. And I think there were – my father had a couple of cousins who managed to get to **Lithuania**, to **Latvia**, **Estonia**, whatever, and managed to buy a ticket to **Mexico**.

Q: I see.

A: But we didn't.

Q: Okay. So, you leave **Warsaw**, do you think it was within a week or two of having just stayed there? How long – do you remember how long you stayed and then moved on, or not?

A: No, I don't remember.

Q: Okay. When was the first time you saw any – any foreign soldier? Was it a Russian soldier, Soviet soldier, or a German soldier?

A: I s – I saw a German fighter plane attacking the cars on the road. And what my mother did – this was typical of my mother – she grabbed me out of the car, ran into the –

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A2: Ditch.

A: – ditch on the side of the road, had me fall there, and put herself on top of me.

He flew over, and didn't – didn't shoot us.

Q: And then she went back to the car with you?

A: Yep. And we continued.

Q: And this was the first sign that you saw that here's something foreign in my territory, in my – in my world.

A: I presume – I presume it was, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And then, of course, while this was happening, the Ukrainians were trying to attack all those cars, pretty rich cars, with pitchforks, to –

Q: Were the Ukrainians within Polish territory?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay, so that eastern part, that had – the eastern part of **Poland**, you must have already been in that section.

A: Yep.

Q: Okay. And you saw some of this.

A: Yep.

Q: And did they succeed in attacking the cars, did they succeed –

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A: Well, not that I saw, but I'm sure they did.

Q: Okay. That must have been a little scary for a kid.

A: Oh yeah. I was never very brave. I was always scared of something.

Q: Oh. Well, there's plenty to be scared of. You say that you – your car was taken away at some point, even before you reached **Lwów**, is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: How did that happen? You weren't there.

A: I was there, but I don't remember.

Q: So it was like you were driving along in the car –

A: No, no, we were in – in a small town or something, and you couldn't either buy gas, or whatev – somehow or other. And th – the Russians were there already.

Q: So you saw them in that town?

A: At that point, yes. And then I saw them in **Lwów**, and that's – that I remember, and I'll never forget it as long as I live.

Q: So tell me what you saw.

A: The picture was that on one of the most elegant streets, there walked a Russian family. First the soldier, with his stupid uniform – and their uniforms were so, kind of, inelegant, and with the hat, with the two kids. And behind him a few steps, was

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the wife, with all the coats, and all – all the things, was behind him, carrying everyth – all their paraphernalia.

Q: Their belongings.

A: Yep.

Q: So she was – she was the –

A: And she – oh, and she – what they did was, when they arrived in **Lwów**, they robbed a magazine of Polish made underwear.

Q: You mean a store?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No, I think it was a magazine, someplace.

Q: So they were – a – a – a jour – like a magazine?

A: No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

Q: So what's a magazine?

A2: Storage. Storage place.

A: A storage place.

Q: A storage place, a storage facility.

A: Yep.

Q: Okay.

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A: And – cause **Poland** was making very nice underwear.

Q: Ladies' underwear.

A: Ladies' underwear, before the war. And it was – it wasn't silk, was artificial silk of some kind. And all of a sudden all – all these wives were wearing this stuff, and the kids were running after them, and laughing at them.

Q: So in other words, they were taking like – like night dresses –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and wearing them as regular day clothes, like –

A: Elegant day clothes, long, beautiful. And **Lwów** was full of churches, big churches, small churches, they were all different denominations. So the kids had plenty to run into and hide, and – and you know, look from behind the thing, and laugh.

Q: And laugh. And not get in – not get caught, in other words.

A: That's right.

Q: Where did you settle then, in **Lwów**? How did you eventually get there? Did you have to take a train, did you walk? Did you –

A: Well, I don't know how we settled in **Lwów**, but we me – we were able – I don't – my parents did it, they were able to rent a room from a widow of a professor of

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the university. The professor had already passed away, but his son was now a big to-do, and – but he was drafted or something, so she –

Q: Into the Polish military?

A: Yeah. So she had a room, and she rented us the room. She didn't want to be by herself, and she wanted some income.

Q: Yeah. Tell me, why do you think your father went east, rather than west – not when you were an eight year old child, but afterwards? What was the reasoning behind that? How did you explain it to yourself?

A: What did – what do you mean?

Q: Well, when you –

A: We were fleeing east.

Q: But why? Why?

A: **Germany** was – Germans were not our friends. They would arrest us.

Q: Because?

A: We were Polish. The war was on.

Q: And the Russians were not as threatening.

A: That's right.

Q: So, you felt safe when you went to **Lwów**?

A: Not really.

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Q: Okay.

A: A funny thing happened when we went to **Lwów**. This woman that we rented the room from lived in a – an apartment house, an old-fashioned apartment house, that was **situ** on a street right next to a park. And **Lwów** is full of hills and things. That park, at that point, had a pretty big hill. And as my mother was pushing me into the stairway to go down to the – oh, what do you call it? Basement. A bomb hit the – the park, that – that hill.

Q: Okay.

A: And the whole house kind of went down, and then back up again. That I – feeling I remember.

Q: How – how odd. That it could go down yes, but that it would kind of rise once more.

A: Yup. Went down and back up.

Q: And you felt the movement?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: I was try – when I asked why did your parents go east, I was trying not to ask a leading question, and now I will ask the leading question. Could it be that your father figured because he had a Jewish background someplace, felt that truly he

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certainly wasn't safe in the west, and would be safer in the east? Do you think that had anything to do with it? Or, that didn't play in the reasoning at all.

A: I don't know.

Q: You don't know. And later he never ta –

A: And I don't want to guess.

Q: Okay.

A: All I know is that he, later on, kept talking about the fact that he had, much earlier, planned to move to the **Riviera**, and he should have moved earlier. But that's all I heard – remember.

Q: Just to get out of **Poland**.

A: To live permanently.

Q: Yeah. The – wou – and that wasn't connected with the war, or any of those events?

A: No, no, no, no, no, no.

Q: Okay.

A: Would have been a nice place to live, beautiful life.

Q: Okay. When – when you were in **Lwów**, did your parents have, do you think, enough money to be able to buy food, support themselves, support you?

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A: No, they didn't, so my father found himself a job of translations at the university.

And he had quite a bit of work. So I know that would have been an income.

Otherwise, I have no idea about money.

Q: Okay. Did it look like things were a lot tighter at home, at that point?

A: Sure, because from a large apartment, and – and servants and all this, we were down to one room.

Q: Were you able to bring any of your toys with you, any of your games? Or you had nothing?

A: No, I don't think I even bothered.

Q: Okay.

A: There was a game that I – somebody bought me in the very beginning of the war, that I lived with.

Q: What kind of game is it?

A: But w-w-what would we call this? **Wojczus**(ph), you know what I'm talking about? **Wojczus**(ph)?

Q: He doesn't.

A: Huh?

Q: He do – he doesn't. He doesn't know which game.

A: Yes, he does.

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Q: Oh, he does, okay.

A: I think he does.

A2: Can I say?

Q: Yes, say.

A2: It's – you have lights, lightbulbs, four lightbulbs. When you press certain things, they go a certain way, and she was believing that this is miracle.

Q: Okay, I'll –

A: Oh no, that was the earlier.

A2: **[indecipherable]** this was not miracle, because she opened up the toy and found it has battery and everything **[indecipherable]**

A: Och, was I upset.

Q: Ah, so the – I'll repeat this so that it will be on – on tape, that earlier, when you were younger, you had gotten a toy that had light bulbs that would light up in certain ways when you pressed a button, and you thought that it was miraculous.

A: Right.

Q: Yes. And when you opened it up and saw that it was run by a battery, it was –

A: And then red wires. I was very disappointed.

Q: It takes the magic out of everything.

A: Yep.

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Q: Yeah. But that's not the toy you were talking about.

A: No. **[speaks Polish here]**

A2: I don't know the name of it, but you moved the **[indecipherable]** 10 points, let's say, until you have the proper connect – proper sequence, like one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10.

A: There was a thing this size, and you moved numbers –

Q: Oh. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah –

A: With one – one – one empty spot.

Q: I know that. I don't know what to call it either, but it's a very – you move them around like – like squares.

A: Yeah.

Q: And they're not in a sequence, and you put them in the sequence.

A: Right. That's what I was –

Q: Well, you know, it shows your math proclivities.

A: Yeah.

Q: You know, it – the –

A: That's what kept me – my mind, kind of, from going nuts.

Q: Did you go to school in **Lwów**?

A: Yes.

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Q: Okay.

A: For about a year.

Q: Okay.

A: I was able to go to a – a cloister school, to a –

Q: To a Catholic school again?

A: Catholic school, yeah.

Q: Was it mu –

A: The nuns were run – it was close, and it was run by the nuns. And that's where my mother met this teacher, and she became very friendly with her. And that's where the two of them decided to teach me Polish spelling, and indeed they did. I will – I don't think I ever make Polish spelling errors.

Q: That – it was that good.

A: But that's from then.

Q: That's from then, from that good teacher.

A: Yep.

Q: And this was as you were a third grader. Did you like the teacher?

A: I loved her. And I was what grade? I suppose third.

Q: Okay.

A: Third, fourth, maybe?

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Q: Was there anyone to play with there?

A: Not really. No, not really.

Q: And your mother, I take it, must have stayed at home, or did she also work when you were in **Lwów**.

A: No, she stayed home, she had to cook, and clean and she had needed an operation.

Q: What kind of operation did she need.

A: A hysterectomy.

Q: Oh, so she needed to recover from that.

A: That's right, and that's why we were not deported to **Russia**, like all the other people who fled east were – most of them were deported. But she had a piece of paper, that she needs that surgery, so – and the – the Russians saw that, they left us alone.

Q: What happened to the lady whose apartment you were renting a room from, was she deported?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: Because she was local. They were deporting people who came from the west.

Q: Do you remember anything about that? Did you see any of these things?

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A: I saw it all, I remember the woman, I remember what she looked like. I remember she was taking care of her girlfriend's two children, who were grown-ups at that point. And the woman was beautiful, and I remember her. I remember her name was **Dada**(ph), I – but I don't remember – I used to remember her last name, and I don't remember any more.

Q: Do you remember anything from those deportations that you so luckily missed at that time?

A: No, because, I was not involved.

Q: You didn't see – so you didn't see soldiers coming in, or trucks on the street with people, or –

A: Yes, but – but it didn't apply to us.

Q: Okay, so it didn't register with you.

A: Nope.

Q: Okay. Did your parents talk about it?

A: Oh, su – you bet.

Q: What are some of the things they said, do you remember?

A: What – what?

Q: What are some of the things they said?

A: I don't remember.

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Q: You don't remember, yeah.

A: It was a question of being able to stay, and not having to be deported to **Russia**.

Q: And – and so, can I assume they lived in a kind of state of constant nervousness?

A: Yes.

Q: Did their personalities change?

A: No.

Q: So your mother still was the strict one, and your father still was your playmate?

A: Yes.

Q: But he was without a car now.

A: Right.

Q: So he – so he couldn't take you anyplace.

A: Well, we used to walk places.

Q: And so how did life continue for you? Did you see any Polish soldiers in **Lwów**?

A: No.

Q: Nothing?

A: There was – there was no such thing.

Q: Okay. Through those travels – I'm going to go back a little bit, when you leave **Poznan**, a week before the war happens, and you have the German plane shooting on a car on the road, and you get to **Warsaw**, and then you get – go further east –

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A: No, that was between **Warsaw** and **Lwów**, that German plane.

Q: Okay, th – okay, so that happens between **Warsaw** and **Lwów**, and you're on your road east, did you ever see any Polish military at all?

A: No.

Q: You never saw any Polish soldiers?

A: They just didn't exist any more. And they were fleeing. They were fleeing to **Romania**. They then regrouped, I think, in **Italy**.

Q: Mm-hm. This is stuff you learned later, most likely.

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: Yeah. Okay, so how did life progress for you and your family in **Lwów**? What happened – what – what happened after that, after you know, your f – your third grade –

A: Well eventually, my father decided we have to go back to **Warsaw**

[interruption] What?

A2: 1941 attack of rush – of ger –

A: Germans, right?

A2: – and they took **Lwów** from Russian.

Q: Okay, so –

A: And my father decided it's time to go back to **Warsaw**.

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Q: Oh, I see, so first the Germans attacked the **Soviet Union**.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you saw German soldiers in the streets. Did you? You don't remember, or –

A: I don't know.

Q: But your father then says, time to go back to **Warsaw**.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you did?

A: A lar – yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Be in a large a place as possible, to disappear.

Q: Okay. And do you remember anything of the journey?

A: No.

Q: Okay. Where did you end up in **Warsaw**?

A: In a small apartment that my grandfather had rented when he moved from

Poznan to Warsaw.

Q: And this would have been your mother's father?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And you stayed with him?

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A: Well, there was a wife, who was like a second wife, or something like that. We stayed there, but I don't remember much.

Q: Did you stay there for a long time, in this apartment, in **Warsaw**?

A: I think we stayed there until the **Warsaw** uprising.

Q: So quite a long time, three years.

A: So two years, three years.

Q: And how did your parents occupy themselves during those two or three years?

A: Oh, they were trying to make money in all kinds of ways. My mother used to make some sort of hairnets. That didn't bring much income, but it brought something. What my father did, I have no idea.

Q: You were growing up though, you were no longer eight years old. In 1941, you would have been 10.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then by the time of the uprising, you would have been 13. You're a young, adolescent teenager. Were you becoming more aware of what was going on around you?

A: Oh yes. And i – and you see, what happened was that I got rheumatic fever in 1944, so I – I was quite sick, so they – my mother's sister had a – a floor, I think, in a villa outside of **Warsaw**, so they moved me over there.

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Q: A-And so –

A: And I s – then I stayed there until after the war.

Q: Oh. What did you eat – I want to go back to **Lwów**. How did you feed yourselves, what kind of food did you eat?

A: The only thing I remem – I remember from **Lwów**, that when my mother had that operation, my father and I ra-ran the – the house.

Q: Okay.

A: And my father was a – as you heard, a corker. So he was able to get potatoes someplace. We had potatoes, we had onions, and some oil, and he made different variations –

Q: From those three things?

A: – of those three. And every day we had something different. Oh God.

Q: But with all of those things, I mean, oil one day – oil, potatoes and onions, the next day potato, oil and onions, things like that. Okay.

A: Yes, yeah, that was my father's system.

Q: Well, clearly then, food was a problem.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: And did it continue to be a problem when you got to **Warsaw**?

A: That I don't remember.

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Q: Okay.

A: I remember one thing, I'm aware of one thing, the reason they got me into the vis – the nuns ran a school – what?

Q: A convent.

A: Yeah. Was because they were hiding Jewish girls, and what they needed was food. So, the way to get your kid there was to provide like a s – a sack of flour, so many potatoes, and stuff. So that's where I went for – because there was no way for me to go to school. There was – there was not for –

Q: And this is in **Lwów**, or in **Warsaw**?

A: **Warsaw**.

Q: In **Warsaw**. And did they teach you anything there, in the convent?

A: Yeah. There was whatever it was. It was whatever the curriculum was.

Q: Was it like your husband's situation, where you had to kind of keep quiet, that this wasn't a real school, it was just –

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: We had to have these **tabliczky**.

A2: Tables.

A: No. **Wojczus**(ph), what – what is it?

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Q: Some kind of a certificate or something?

A: No, no, no, things you could draw on with a –

Q: A tablet of some kind.

A: Yeah, yes, yes.

Q: Like a – a black –

A: Yes, yes –

Q: – a small blackboard type thing.

A: – yes, yes, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: That's the only thing we could use, because we had to erase it, in case.

Q: I see. Were there other – many other children at the convent?

A: Oh yes, quite a few, they – and most of them were Jewish girls. They were – they were saving Jewish kids.

Q: Were you – did you –

A: And then, when the uprising came, they were all killed, because was bombed, and that's it, they all went.

Q: The nuns, and the girls –

A: Yep.

Q: – and everybody. What was the name of the convent, do you remember?

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A: Slotwik(ph) Stanke(ph).

Q: Smartwik(ph) Stanke(ph)?

A: Smartwik(ph) Stanke(ph). I've had my special, favorite nun there, that I was able to – that was the only person I visited before Mother and I left **Poland** after the war.

Q: What made her special?

A: I don't know. I just liked her. And she would – by then she was in **Poznan**, so I went to see her, but by then, because of everything that was going on, she lost her mind a little bit. She was not normal. So I'm not sure that she knew who I was –

Q: How sad.

A: – when I went to say goodbye.

Q: How sad.

A: Yeah.

Q: Tragic.

A: But that's – but that's the war. That's the way things went.

Q: Do you – what – did you get any sense that your parents were involved in any underground activity at all?

A: I think they were, but they were being careful, having me. They – they didn't have as much freedom of movement.

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Q: Than if they hadn't had a child.

A: That's right.

Q: And I want to go back to a question about your father, maybe even your mother, I don't know, did they – do you think they felt a special fear that their Jewish background could come to the fore, somehow. That they could be exposed, that you know, generations back –

A: I don't think they even thought about it.

Q: Okay.

A: Right, **Wojczus**(ph)?

A2: Well I – I think the mother had more Semitic look than her father, and she was constantly afraid that they would stop her on the street, and –

A: She was?

Q: Okay. I'm going to repeat what your husband say –

A: See, I didn't know.

Q: – said, is that he thinks your mother had more of a Semitic look than your father –

A: She thought so.

Q: She thought she did. And she was very afraid that she would be stopped on the street, and arrested.

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A: If that's what she – he says, he should know.

Q: Did you know your mother-in-law, did you meet her?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Okay, and so she would tell –

A2: The father was **[indecipherable]** I'm not sure about, he was probably circumcised, and the Germans would stop, if they would see anti-Semitic – I mean, the Semitic face, they would stop and put down your pants, I want to see who you are. If they found that this was the case –

Q: Okay, I'm going to repeat what you just said. Your husband is close by, and I want to repeat what he said. Your father probably, he says, was circumcised.

A: Yes.

Q: And then one of the dangers he would have had is Germans would often stop men on the street, or boys on the street, and o – and order them to pull down their trousers –

A: Yeah.

Q: – to see who they were, and if they saw something like that, then they're in danger of being shot. So, although –

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A: Yeah, yes, yep. But he still did go out. He did go to different places in the city. I remember him even that – I refused to go, I was afraid, I didn't want to know – go. He said look, we have to live, let's try our luck.

Q: So he would – he was – he was taking risks.

A: Yes.

Q: Did – did your parents ever talk with you about what was happening to the Jews in the **Warsaw** ghetto? Did they ever mention something like that going on?

A: Do you think they did?

A2: They must have, because this was, you know, d-during the uprising –

A: Everybody was –

A2: – Jewish uprising, 1943, the whole **Warsaw** was – was hard to breathe, because of the fire, because of what was going on. Everybody knew that something is going on.

Q: Okay. What your husband says is that he thinks that –

A: I think he's right.

Q: – that they must have been speaking about it, because in – during the **Warsaw** ghetto uprising in 1943, there was fire, it was difficult to breathe –

A: Not join – not –

Q: Not the **wars** – not the **Warsaw** uprising, the ghetto uprising.

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A: Nobody joined that, but we –

Q: No, not joining it, they – they heard about it, they saw it, yeah.

A: They knew about it.

Q: Yeah.

A2: It's wrong too, there were Polish guys who joined resistance of the Jews, but there were very few. This wasn't a mass [indecipherable] because we didn't have armaments, we didn't have possibility to hurt Jews.

Q: Okay, your husband's saying that there were some Polish guys, very few, who did join the ghetto uprising, but not in a massive way, as there weren't armaments. There wasn't any – any way to really help.

A: That's right.

Q: Yeah. So you – do you think that you were kind of shielded from these things? Did you feel nervous yourself?

A: No, I think I was shielded.

Q: Yeah?

A: Being a kid, I was shielded, yeah.

Q: Okay. Was the convent where you were sent, was that outside of town? Or was that –

A: Pretty much.

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A2: No, it was in town.

A: It wasn't in town [**indecipherable**]

A2: That's right, that's town. That's part of –

Q: Yes, but was it sort of a suburban area, outside the certain –

A2: It's like **Queens** in relation to **Manhattan**.

Q: So you're saying it's like **Queens** in relation to **Manhattan**. I guess I'm just trying to get a sense of whether the location of the convent would have been part of what helped shield you, because –

A: No.

Q: No, no.

A: No.

A2: German usually didn't go to convent, because – I don't know why, but they were –

Q: Okay, okay, so you got rheumatic fever, and then you were sent somewhere else, is that right?

A: I was sent to my aunt. My mother's sister was renting the top floor of a villa, outside of **Warsaw**. Was mostly because of my uncle, who was –

Q: A little crazy.

A: **Yeah**.

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Q: Okay.

A: He always thought that – he had lung problems as a youngster, and he was always worried about his lungs. So I think that's why she rented that –

Q: Place.

A: – and it came in handy, because I had to recuperate.

Q: And was it then good for lungs, actually?

A: Yeah

Q: And – and, do you remember when you were sent there, was this is '43, or '44?

A: This was just before the **Warsaw** uprising.

Q: So you were living separately from your parents?

A: Well, my mother was able to get there the day of the uprising, so I was with my mother –

Q: I see.

A: – the whole time, but not my father, he went to concentration camps, and stuff.

Q: Tell me – tell me what happened with your father.

A: He was a-arrested like the rest of the population.

Q: Well, do you know the circumstances, and the details of w – of how this came to happen?

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A: Not really. I don't know what was happening to – to the population. I know my aunt – **[telephone ringing]**

Q: Excuse me, please.

A: – tried to get into the – one of these transit places, to get him out, and my mother was very upset because it was dangerous to do that. And she never managed, anyway. So eventually, he ended up in **Bergen-Belsen**, which was the worst camp there was.

Q: But I want to go back a little bit. Your mother comes on the first – you know, on the first day she manages to get to you, but your father doesn't.

A: That's right.

Q: He stays in your apartment in **Warsaw**.

A: Right.

Q: And he is then arrested with lots of other people.

A: Right.

Q: Rounded up with lots of other – you don't know how or where or whether he –

A: We don't know, no.

Q: Anything like that. But did you – how did you find out that he was arrested?

How did you find out –

A: Because there was nobody left in **Warsaw**. They didn't leave anybody.

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Q: Do you remember the neighborhood that you lived in in **Warsaw**?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was it – what was it called, that he would have been located in?

A: **Wojczus**(ph), what was that?

A2: [indecipherable] It was three blocks away.

Q: Okay, what was it called? I'd like to say it on –

A2: **Kolonia Staszica**.

Q: **Kolonia Staszica**. So, from **Kolonia Staszica**, people – the apartments were being emptied out.

A: Ev – from everywhere.

Q: From everywhere, okay.

A2: I think that's where her father was arrested, like I was arrested. But he was – as lucky as I was, he was sent to concentration camp, and I was sent to labor camp.

Q: Okay, so what your husband is saying is that he thinks that your father was arrested from **Kolonia Staszica** at – the same as he was, but he was not as lucky as your husband –

A: Yes.

Q: – in that he was sent to a concentration camp –

A: Yes.

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Q: – not to a labor camp. And was he sent directly to **Bergen-Belsen**, do you know?

A: No

Q: Where was he sent first?

A: Could it be **Neuengamme**?

A2: No, I don't think so. It was some other place, I don't –

Q: So you don't know even – or you don't remember, okay.

A: I'm not sure. My mother knew.

Q: But you fi – so, in other words, what I'm surprised by is that he – you found out that he's rounded up, so that your aunt, you know, wanted to go into a transit place to try and release him. That means somehow information got to you.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Oke –

A: Yes.

Q: And – and do you remember how – how you felt, I mean, when they told you your father has been arrested?

A: It was – remember, I was what, 13.

Q: Thirteen.

A: It was a very special time. There was the Russians to worry about. If – if they found a female someplace, there was huge problem. There was really very little to

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eat. There were – there were all kinds of problems. And then these relatives of an aristocratic family that lived in – nearer to **Poznan** had a small – the family had a small farm, and they were farming it because it gave them some food, and stuff. So, they had a white horse, and their daughter managed to get a red dress. And all you could see was her on a white horse, because it was the Polish colors.

Q: Red and white. This was in –

A: 1944 – '43, something like that.

Q: But that's far away, in **Poznan**.

A: No, that was just near **Warsaw**.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: **Poznan** was not a-accessible to us, because it was considered part of **Germany**.

Q: I see, I see.

A: We just – later on, when my mother was hoping to connect with my father, as soon as she could, we moved to **Poznan** because she figured that that's where he would be looking for us. And indeed –

Q: He did.

A: – he was.

Q: Okay, but let's stay back in **Warsaw**. She's there, succeeded to be with you, your father's arrested, you somehow find out about it, but you don't remember, you

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know, that circumstance of finding out, but essentially your pal is no longer around, you know.

A: That's right.

Q: The strict one is there, but – but your –

A: Yes, but our relationship with my mother changed a lot –

Q: In what way?

A: – because – because we were just left the two of us. So she was more – she was softer, she was, you know, less strict and stuff. And it was like the two of us against the world, then mostly to find my father. So it was a different attitude.

Q: Well, it also suggests to me – and I don't want to put words in your mouth or interpret in the wrong way, but you weren't completely alone.

A: No.

Q: That is, you still had one parent –

A: Yes.

Q: – to be able to hold onto. And a strong parent, at that.

A: Right.

Q: And so it wasn't like your security was completely shattered.

A: No.

Q: Okay. Okay.

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A: And then there was my aunt, and there was her husband **Thicke**(ph), he – he has problems with his lungs. Oh God.

Q: So you have characters in your family, in addition to this context award.

A: Know what he did now, about a year or two years ago? He started a fire in his little one room apartment in **Warsaw**, and burnt all my pictures of the other relatives.

Q: Oh, oh.

A: What am I gonna do, kill him?

Q: No, of course not. Of course not. People do very inexplicable things sometimes.

A: Sure, and you have to know when to get upset, and when to just let it go.

Q: That's right. That's right. So – so tell me, how did things progress for you and your mother? You were in this villa –

A: Well, what progre – the way it worked out for us, was that the – the war sort of passed us by that the – the Russians came, and then they went ea – west. And I think we had the communist Polish state, right?

A2: Yes.

Q: So, in other words –

A: And –

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Q: – did you – did the – wa – when – did you feel that – you talked about a fear of the Russians coming, and being a women, and how you're in particular danger.

A: That's when that happened –

Q: Yeah.

A: – because they sent in these totally wild creatures. They didn't seem to be normal people.

Q: And you saw these? You saw such people?

A: Yeah, we were looking of – from behind curtains, in windows.

Q: Did any come to your apartment?

A: First of all, there was no apartment, was –

Q: The – the top floor of the villa.

A: – this villa – no, they – they were a little afraid of that, I think. So what they did was, in front of the villa, for quite a while, there – there were – there was enough space for three or four villas that were supposed to have been built before the war, they weren't. It was a beautiful piece of land, full of flowers and things, and that's where they settled. Because –

Q: Set up camp?

A: Pardon?

Q: Did they set up camp there?

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A: Sort of. And they ate whatever grew there. Whatever was growing, they ate.

Q: Okay. And they didn't approach the villa?

A: No.

Q: Oh then – then, you saw them kind of like in the distance?

A: I saw them from behind curtains in the window. Why did that happened? I don't know. Whether they were afraid that there were Polish people with – with guns, or – or wha – I don't know.

Q: Did they stay there long, and – and then move on?

A: Yes. And then all of a sudden they disappeared.

Q: Okay. Okay. And do you remember what it was like – I mean tha – when the war ended? Do you remember the war ending?

A: I don't remember the – like how we found out, whether it was radio, or – or – I don't know, how did we find out?

Q: Or a neighbor could have told you, or something, you know.

A: Or my mother found out, my mother and my aunt maybe went to **Warsaw** looking for some of their possessions, whatever? I don't know. I know that my mother decided that it was time for the two of us to go back to **Poznan**, our hometown, just in case my father shows up, or looks for us.

Q: And you did that?

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A: Yep. And then when she get to **Poznan**, turned out, I suppose since most people knew her, she got the bank job, she got another job, she had three jobs.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: Supporting us.

Q: Did you go back to your old home?

A: We couldn't, because there were four families living there. But we could go to my aunt's apartment, because it was much smaller, and we managed to get a room there.

Q: Okay. And – and you stayed there for how long?

A: Until my father got us to **Sweden**.

Q: When did he come back from the camps?

A: Well, he got in touch with us – I don't know.

A2: In **Sweden**.

A: Huh? From **Sweden**, but when?

A2: He ended up in **Sweden**, like I did, and from there he start looking, and found out that they are alive.

Q: Okay, so your husband says that he – he – from the camps he got to **Sweden**, and then started searching for you –

A: Right.

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Q: – and find – found out that you are alive, and you are in **Poznan**.

A: He sent a letter to **Poznan**, and then my mother answered him.

Q: I see. So you hadn't seen him yet?

A: No.

Q: Okay. Okay. And – and were you able to leave to go to **Sweden**, or did he have to come get you? How did that happen?

A: No, no, no, no. He had to buy visas from somebody.

Q: For both of you.

A: Yep.

Q: Okay.

A: This was already the Polish communist set up, so it wasn't that easy.

Q: So, what year did you leave **Poland** to go to **Sweden**?

A: Forty-six.

Q: Forty-six.

A: December '46.

Q: So you li – still lived in **Poland** for a year and a half, after the war ends. And – and –

A: And I went to school.

Q: Do you remember what it was like?

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A: Yeah.

Q: It cer – it must not have been a Catholic school any more. Was it?

A: No, it was a public school.

Q: And did it differ at all from the –

A: No, it was like it used to be before.

Q: Okay.

A: Except that more than half of the students were over 20, because those were the girls that couldn't go to school at all during the war. They were the local girls. So it was a problem, because there was a mixture.

Q: And what grade did you start – when you went to school in 1945, to in nine – to 1946, that school year, and then the second fall –

A: That was the fourth year of gymnasium.

Q: For you?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: So, the last I remember is that you went into third grade in **Lwów**, and – no.

A: No, no, no, no, no, that was much younger.

Q: Yeah, you were much younger in **Lwów**, and then you had some schooling in the convent. And then –

A: That's right, and then this was – here was after the war, and I was 14. So it's a –

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Q: I know, but –

A: – it's th-the – the next – the next –

Q: But did you jump from, let's say, fourth year in elementary school, to the fourth year of gymnasium, without having any formal education between them. Do you know what I'm asking?

A: Yes. I'm not sure.

Q: Okay.

A: I – how could I have jumped?

A2: She told me once that she was going through private lessons, private education –

Q: Okay.

A2: – at home, and she had many, many years was behind. But this education at this time, was for everybody. All those people who lost four or five years of education, they had to catch up. And that's – they push, push, push.

Q: Okay, I'm going to repeat that on tape, is that your husband says is that you told him at one point that in those years where you couldn't go to school formally, you had some private lessons at home, and that even the –

A: I don't remember that.

Q: You don't remember that, okay. But that after the war, just as you said –

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A: Then I was able to pick –

Q: Pick up.

A: Catch up.

Q: Catch up. Catch up, and – and finish at least the fourth year of gymnasium.

A: That's right.

Q: Okay.

A: So what was left was two years of lyceum.

Q: Okay.

A: But I – by then I left.

Q: Okay. And you went to – and so that's the first time you saw your father, in 1946

–

A: Yes.

Q: – probably two and a half years –

A: You're right.

Q: – since the **Warsaw** uprising. What did he look like? Could you recognize him?

A: Sure, he was the same.

Q: Did he – had he –

A: He wa – his hair was grayer.

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Q: Okay. Did he – so he – he had has – also had time to recover from the concentration camps.

A: Yes.

Q: So he probably didn't look as bad as –

A: That's right.

Q: Okay. Did he talk about it, at all, what he had gone through?

A: That I don't remember.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't remember.

Q: Was he the same pal that you had before?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah?

A: And all I know is he came, he looked around, he met with people, this and that, he said, there's no more **Poland** for 50 years. It'll be 50 years before there's **Poland** again. He was right, to the day.

Q: Amazing.

A: Because it took 50 years then for this current regime to come into existence.

Q: Amazing that he had that kind of foresight.

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A: And he said – he said – and he said he wasn't going to wait for it there, because he had known the Russian Bolsheviks from over there.

Q: Yeah. So, clearly he didn't want to go back to **Poland**. The idea was to get you two out.

A: He said he couldn't.

Q: Okay.

A: This was not a **Poland** he could go back to.

Q: How long did you stay in **Sweden**?

A: We ended up staying in **Sweden** for four years, but that's because he had a heart attack, and had to be – had to be cured from it.

Q: Did you learn Swedish?

A: Yes.

Q: And did you –

A: I don't remember a word. I spoke Swedish so they couldn't recognize where I was from.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then the Swedish knowledge, gone.

Q: It happens. It happens.

A: It obviously happens, it happened to me.

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Q: Did you integrate? Did you have Swedish friends?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you like your time in **Sweden**?

A: Yeah. **Sweden** is a nice country to be in.

Q: And –

A: Especially if you're a student.

Q: You went to Swedish schools?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: I do – what happened was, and that was a problem my father had. Gymnasium in **Sweden** was four years, especially for foreigners, and he figured four years we don't have, because we should be able to leave for the **United States** sooner.

Q: So he was always looking at it as a stepping stone?

A: Yes. Then we found a two year commercial gymnasium, and that's where I went.

Q: I see.

A: So I learned my Swedish, I learned my accounting from there. I learned quite a bit of business law there, too.

Q: And when did you leave for the **United States**?

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A: We finally left in February of '51. Finally.

Q: Where did you meet your husband?

A: Over in **Sweden**.

Q: In school?

A: We were traveling in the same Polish group, and I always thought he was a very interesting guy, but he wouldn't look at me. I was just a kid, and he had nothing to do with kids, right? **Wojczus(ph)**?

Q: He is diplomatically not saying anything.

A: That's right.

Q: Okay. And where did you wen – when you came to the **United States**, where did you come to, what part of the **States**?

A: **New York City**.

Q: And you stayed here then?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. How did – did your father find j – find work?

A: He found some part-time work. He couldn't do anything more, because of his heart. So, my moth – I found work with this Swedish-American line, and my mother found work with some sort of a business outfit. So with the two of us working, we could manage.

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Q: You could support the family.

A: Yeah.

Q: And where did you end up – what part of **New York City** did you end up moving to?

A: **Rego Park**.

Q: **Rego Park**. So since you came to the **United States**, you've lived in **Queens**?

A: Yes.

Q: Your whole life, okay.

A: But I worked in **Rockefeller Center** by **Atlas**. You know where **Atlas** is?

Q: Mm-hm. And how long did you work there?

A: Five years.

Q: Five years. And when did you meet your husband again? Was it in the mid 50s?

A: When did we meet again?

A2: In 1954.

Q: In 1954.

A: 1954 he came? Yeah, and when he came again, I – that's when I decided, that's the guy for me. But it took me a while to rearrange life, for it to become a reality.

Q: But it happened, yes?

A: Yes.

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A2: I was married at the time, to the other woman.

Q: Ah, I see.

A2: There were all kinds of complications.

Q: Okay. And when did you get married? What year was that?

A: It was –

A2: Fifty-eight.

A: Huh? '58?

Q: 1958. And you have two children?

A: Yep.

Q: Okay.

A: Sec – there was some – no, August 16th, right?

Q: August 16th, 1958.

A: Right.

Q: Okay, we're coming close to the end of the interview. I want to ask a couple of general questions.

A: Okay.

Q: Number one, is there anything that I have not asked you about, that you would like to add to your story, that we – that should be part of it?

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A: Well, the fact that I worked, that I never stayed home with the kids, I always worked, because it was a question of supporting my parents. And – don't put it in there, but we had a big fight –

Q: Cut. **[break]** Did you – did you study in the **United States**, did you continue your studies?

A: Yes, because when I came – yes, that's funny, too. I went to **Columbia**.

Q: University?

A: Yes. To **[indecipherable]**. But in those days, it wasn't the university, it was **Barnard**. And they said they don't accept displaced persons.

Q: Really?

A: Yep. So I turned around, didn't say anything, and went to **Hunter College**. And **Hunter College** said sure, any time, you just have to pass an exam, an English exam. So I went to take the exam, I passed it, and I was in.

Q: What did you study, what was your major?

A: Well, then it was, you know, **[indecipherable]** what I had from **Sweden**, and I wanted those credits and all that, so I studied business law, or some such stupid thing. But – and then my father said, go to statistics, it's sort of **[indecipherable]** but statistics and I don't get along. So I ended up being a math major. And when I

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was about to finish, the chairlady of the math department, a wonderful lady, said don't worry, there is a new field, I'll get you a job. And that was computers.

Q: No kidding.

A: Yep. And he – that was a funny thing too, because she was in touch with **Remington Rand**, they were the earlier ones on the computers, and she was going to – there was a opening in **Brazil**, I believe. My mother didn't like the idea at all. And then it turned out that the guy they sent from here, got some nasty disease, whatever it is. So that – that was that. And – what happened?

Q: Oh, and then you were – you had finished, and you – there was a job opening in **Brazil**, the guy got sick.

A: But th – I know, that fell through, and – what was I doing then? Then I – how I got that job, I don't know. Through friends, maybe also through **Hunter**, or whatever. There was a company, a research company, on **Union Square**, of all places, that it was four a-and three or whate-ever many scientists. Four were busy with – three were in nuclear physics. The others were in – starts with a **p**. What were they doing?

Q: Do you remember? Okay.

A: Well, anyway –

A2: I don't know what she's talking about.

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A: What? You know what I'm talking about?

A2: No.

A: The – the job on **Union Square**. Larry –

A2: Well, I don't remember his name.

Q: Okay, so –

A: So they – yeah, they – they wanted – they needed people to sit at calculating machines, and calculate their research problems. So I did. Eventually, they assigned me to a group of two people who were doing nuclear physics.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: And – big deal, it's math is math. And the guy who ran this was a genius. He sat with his back to a window, but this is **Union Square**, that window is really high. So he – he always complained, because he said, I'll defenestrate. In other words, he was – he was gonna fall out. He had one pair of pants, and one shirt. He painted his house in it, he went to **Florida** in them and so forth. So the big boss ended up keeping clothes for him.

Q: Oh my God.

A: He had to send him to **IBM** to do some calculations. So he –

Q: He was a character.

A: Oh yes, and brilliant, of course.

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A2: [indecipherable] dogs, and he had a dog with him.

A: What?

Q: And he always had a dog with him, your husband says?

A: No, that's not the one.

Q: That's a different one.

A: That's not the one. There was another one that had a dog under his feet, and he had to be able to – to – oh, to play with his fur. And if he couldn't, he couldn't work. But no, that was another one.

Q: So it sounds like you had – you had quite a Bohemian crowd amongst those –

A: Yes, yes.

Q: – statisticians and nuclear physicists –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and calcula – oh, oh, the –

A: And then, unfortunately, they moved to the island, and I wasn't going to travel to the island. Thank God I didn't, because it – the company, as such, didn't last very long. So one of the girls that I worked with there before, heard that **Brooklyn Polytech** needed someone, because they finally decided to install a computer, and they needed someone to run it. So that's how I moved.

Q: And when did you get your master's degree?

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A: NYU [indecipherable] Institute.

Q: What year?

A: Don't remember.

Q: Okay, okay. So you got –

A: If it was – wait a minute, '56 I got my bachelor's, so this must have been '57 – '58.

Q: Oh, so you got it, it was kind of back to back.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Okay. And so, is there anything else you'd like to add to your story?

Because we talked – you know, I asked before you –

A: Just the fact that there was a time when I was in charge of 400 students –

Q: Wow.

A: – per year. The way this worked out, when I –

A2: This was in a different – this was **C.W. Post** college.

A: That's right, I went there.

Q: To **C.W. Post** after college.

A: Which is – which is part of **Long Island University**, and I was running their computer – what do you call them?

Q: Lab.

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A: Lab.

Q: A computer lab, uh-huh.

A: Which disappeared very shortly after that because they became cheap, and everybody had their own.

Q: Yeah.

A: So, that's where we had to have that open, almost 24 hours a day.

Q: So that the kids could use it.

A: Yes.

Q: Students could use it.

A: Yeah.

Q: Well, did you have the same kind of reactions and difficulties that your husband did, in adjusting to life in the **United States**?

A: No.

Q: No. For you it was easier?

A: Much easier. Well, I had – language was easier.

Q: Okay.

A: For me English was no problem, and that was a big deal.

Q: Yeah. What would you want people to understand about your early life, and how it shaped you? How do you think it shaped you?

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A: You mean in the 30s?

Q: I mean in – going through the war years.

A: No, I would – I would start with the 30s.

Q: Okay.

A: I was in the **Poland**, that there was a rich country, country that everything worked very well and stuff. My parents were successful, and – and making money. And then all of a sudden, it all went pffft. It never came back to that.

A2: Well, **Poland** wasn't rich.

A: What?

A2: **Poland** wasn't rich at that time.

A: Was not rich?

A2: No.

Q: But for her, in her life, yes.

A: Yeah.

Q: It – they were well-to-do, they were – and yet, you survived it, and you – all three of you made it through the war. So they –

A: That's right, because what my father used to – his maxim was, you have to survive. You have to take care of your health. Money comes second – second. You don't worry about money. He kept saying, people who worry about their money,

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and – and do everything they can to save their money, usually don't manage to go through. But if – money is money. If you can keep it, fine, if you can't, you make it again.

Q: Thank you. Thank you for sharing that.

A: You're welking – welcome.

Q: And – and this con – this concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview, with Mrs. **Mary Hermanowski**.

A: Yes.

Q: On August 29th, 2013. Thank you very much.

A: You're more than welcome.

Q: And thanks to both of you for having us here for so many hours today.

A: Oh, that's okay.

Conclusion of Interview