

Jadwiga Chrusciel

Tape 1

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Abstract

Jadwiga Chrusciel was born June 25, 1928 in Spree (?), southern Poland and had an older sister, Vanda. Her father was a Polish Army officer which kept the family moving from place to place as he got promotions. They had military housing in Breslau which had a large area where she learned to ride a bike. When war started, her father became Commandant of the unit. The Russians occupied her area so Russian was the language in school. They moved into the German area of Warsaw and Jadwiga could not attend school so her father brought books for her and her sister to study. Everyone had to register and obtain an ID card. She could smell the bread baking in the Ghetto where the Jews were isolated. Her father was active in the Underground so they kept moving. Jadwiga and her sister walked around Warsaw and saw people rounded up but no killings or dead bodies. She knew there was going to be an uprising. It began at 5 PM on August 1, 1944. Everyone knew where they were supposed to be and their duty. She helped obtain water to put out fires and her sister helped in the hospital. Sometimes the family met at the hotel which was the meeting place. Her father organized the uprising and after three months they gave up to the Germans. Jadwiga and her sister were considered soldiers so were POW and went to a POW camp which was part of Bergen-Belsen. In April '45 they were put on a death march and the next month were liberated by the Americans.

Summary

00:00 Jadwiga Chrusciel was born June 25, 1928 in Spree (?), southern Poland which is now Ukraine, to Antai (?) and Valarie Strieska (?) and had a sister, Vanda, who was four years older. Her father was born June 13, 1895 and he was an Army officer. He fought in the Polish Army at the end of World War I. First he was in the Russian/German/ Austrian Army and then Poland was reborn and he had a ready-made job. His father was called up to the Austrian Army and then had to form his own army for his country.

05:00 Her father got his law degree in Lvov. He achieved rank and a book was published about him recently. He got married in 1924. Her father was seldom at home. As he kept getting promoted, the family moved from one city to another. They lived in 24 different places from 1928 to 1939. They were a military family. Her father easily learned languages which is partly how he got promoted. He knew Latin. Her sister was also good at languages. Her father spoke German as he was in the Austrian Army. He easily learned English. Her mother knew Ukrainian as it still was the same nation. Jadwiga went to school with Jews in Spree (?) and also with Ukrainians who lived there.

- 10:00 Her parents were first class in everything – thinking, dealing with others, not trying to push their own. Her mother was the ideal partner for the father as she took care of the family. She was a painter and played the sitar. She was artistic as created pictures in embroidery. The only time they had military housing was in Breslau. Officers and their family lived in two units with large grounds which was great for children to play. They lived there when the war started. Jadwiga learned to ride a bike there. It was a large city by the river.
- 15:00` Jadwiga attended public schools in each place she lived. She did not like the strange, hostile teachers in Breslau where she lived for a year. It is part of Warsaw now. There was a central academy for officers. In 1939 the entire unit was transferred to the western frontier because war was expected to start. They did not have political talk at the dinner table but she got the idea that something was going on. The entire country was certain that war was coming between the Poles and the Germans. They did not expect the Russians to invade at the same time. She helped build shelters as all the children were involved. Her father was approachable.
- 20:00 She gave his medals to Warsaw. They were the highest orders. He got one in English that she gave to the museum in Warsaw, the Museum of Uprising. She had to talk during the presentation and she said that she recalled sitting on her father's lap and playing with the medals. Her father was not at home much. She saw him more at Breslau. He was the Commandant of the unit. They lived in a beautiful place with trees. When war broke out, they dug ditches. There were sirens that indicated you had to leave the area. Her father was in the west. The Russians invaded so the area was bombarded and the unit left. They had to decide which horses and wagons to use to load their belongings and left for a short distance.
- 25:00 The Russians occupied the area quickly. Her family stayed at someone's villa. The owner accepted people from the road as the country was filling up with the enemy. Soon they returned to Breslau by train. They found their compound was robbed. Everything was lost except for her sister's coat. Her parents had written a book for each sister and they each had some photographs. Since their home was robbed, they stayed in someone else's apartment. School started in September and was held in Russian. They had their own teachers and one spoke Russian, cried and walked out. Jadwiga was in 6th grade.
- 30:00 (She cries.) They were lucky to stay with an officer but it was crowded. When the war ended, they signed the occupation on the German side. Her father was with his regiment and had to retreat. The area still exists as a fortress as the retreating army defended the fortress and signed on condition that the soldiers and officers were free to go home. Her father found the family.

- 35:00 They went to the river at Breslau and the lower grade officers of German nationality organized her mother and sister and herself to cross the river at night on a boat to the German side of Poland. She saw Russian soldiers who were a miserable mess with weapons held by a string. They were sorry looking soldiers. Her father had to act quickly by registering with the Germans and thought of a place they had built before the war. It was a house near the military school center in the heart of Warsaw. They thought they could go there. Officers held training there as it was a university for officers. Officers, sergeants and under officers were given land to build their own homes. It was a colony where they could retire. It was confiscated by the Communists after the war.
- 40:00 They had a garden. They had rented it out as thought they would use it later. It was on the outskirts of Warsaw. They were the families of soldiers. Most were on active duty and did not return as part of the agreement. Jadwiga remembers one family. The Germans occupied the huge area of the university. There was a main road from the train station to the buildings, small shops and colonies for officers and lesser ranks. The Germans did not interact with the families nor did the families talk to the Germans. A German might talk if they wanted to rent a room. It was a civilized occupation at first. Soon they realized the people were not cooperating. Her father was in the Underground who was organizing to take over after the war. They did not realize that the country would be divided between the Communist Russians, the Germans and the Poles. They could not attend school. There were few children.
- 45:00 They did not form units for school at first but the Underground organized. Official school ceased to exist. They were newcomers and lasted a few months as the father registered according to the conditions of surrender and realized they were not ready to cooperate. Poland got a new name, General Government. Everyone received an ID card. Little by little the people got together. They were part of Warsaw. They sent her to print small books as people remembered horrible things that happened. Many houses were occupied before by works. The Germans brought the Russian POWs and people threw them food as they were living skeletons. Jadwiga did not see the POWs. It happened later. The Polish prisoners were placed in a former ammunicions factory.
- 50:00 The Jews lived there and she still remembers the aroma of baked bread. The Jews were isolated in a specific area and one night they were taken away. People were hopeless as they could not help them. Her father had to leave them. They had no furniture. He said he had to disappear but continued in the Underground. He would return at night. As her father was in the Underground, her family had to join places. Her father could not rely upon his German work. If you register, you may be permitted to stay. They could stay as they lived with original residents. Her mother stayed home. They had little to sell. The family had to disappear. The place was open when the father was home. People knew one another as they were all officer families. They saw the father coming and going. One

and a half years later, horrible things happened and they had to disappear. They went on foot to Warsaw.

- 55:00 They took whatever they could carry. They left at night and saw some people walking to church. It was around '42. Her father brought books for her sister and her to study. Her sister had friends her own age. Jadwiga only had one neighbor her own age. They found local places for organizations to meet. They had to be careful that they were not followed. Sometimes they had to find another place to sleep. Jadwiga was 12 at the time. She had an idea of what was happening.
- 60:00 Everyone had to have an ID card. Her fake name was Goetzskeraway (?). There were underground schools. Her father had to be careful to get books as they constantly changed addresses so could not attend Underground schools. There were community units. The children did not get together much. Her mother had to cook in a shared kitchen. They had sufficient food as they went to the villages for eggs and chickens. The Germans would stop trains to confiscate items but still they returned to the villages.
- 65:00 The Ghetto wall was built and it was obvious the Jews were isolated. She still smelled bread that the Jews baked until they were removed. In Warsaw, her father was able to live with them. She would walk the streets of Warsaw with her sister. The Underground grew and her mother, her sister and Jadwiga helped. They wove fabrics and sold them. The doctors and nurses in the hospital were mostly for the Germans. The Underground newspapers predicted how the country's government and agriculture would be organized in the future. Newspapers were printed and delivered. It was amazing how it existed.
- 70:00 The newspapers did not indicate the underground's current activity. They indicated their dreams. She crossed the fields with her sister and walked around Warsaw. She recalls the first church she saw upon her return in the 60s. Every Sunday they attended "Our Savior's Church." On her walks, Jadwiga would see people rounded up and going to work. There were executions but she did not see them. She would see an area cordoned off
- 75:00 There were no buses. She saw people riding the tram. Sometimes her mother was nervous about delivering things. The phones worked and people would call and speak a coded language. The people were very united against the enemy. People on the tram might see something and alert someone. When the Communist took over, there was tragedy as people could not believe that Poles could betray or accuse people of treason
- 80:00 Even today, Jadwiga cannot understand it. She could see the wall but no one imagined what happened there. It was beyond what they knew the Germans could do. The Ghetto was isolated so no one could help them. They put Jews on trains even when the war was ending. The Ghetto was small compared to the rest of the city. She often heard shots and

they might have come from the Ghetto. They cordoned off the street and might bring ten men at noon and kill them. She never saw it happen. She never saw dead people.

- 85:00 There might be blood and people covered it with flowers. There was a list of those who were killed. Loud speakers announced names during the day. She did not know about her father's prominence in the Warsaw Uprising except that people visited at times. She would read the daily bulletin of the Underground. It was mostly women who carried brochures under their coats. Nothing was written about her father. Everyone had a pseudo-name and they kept changing them. They did not have cell phones or smart phones at that time. You could work in Warsaw as it was very crowded and you could disappear. The Germans did not understand the Underground conspiracy. The Uprising was held on August 1, 1944. Life was normal and her father did not speak of it but she knew it was going to happen. They never talked about it because if they knew too much it would betray the family.
- 90:00 Her sister met privately with students. The Uprising began at 5 PM and counted on it being a surprise. Many people did not return home and you did not see some families again. Someone shot a pistol and people came out and built barricades. Jadwiga was at home when it started. Her father disappeared. There was a hotel where they gathered the people in charge. Her father did not warn them ahead of time. She found out her father was the leader when her father's friend came and told them and they moved to the hotel. Her sister helped with the hospital and Jadwiga joined others. When bombs started to fall, she was in a unit which obtained water to put out fires. Jadwiga wore an armband. Later she wrote #1 on her father's armband and placed it in the Museum of the Uprising.
- 95:00 Her father organized the network which he had prepared and Jadwiga just accepted it. One does not talk about what you are having for dinner just the same that she did not think about the network. Her father's friend was a colonel who told them. Everyone had their own place to be at a certain hour and a certain action to undertake. There were telephones. People joined up after the first day. They moved out of the hotel. People came with reports during the night. Now, Jadwiga cannot imagine how they ate. For two months a million people survived. It was her father's achievement. They had sufficient milk for the two months. It was so meticulously organized.
- 100:00 When the front moved, horrible things happened but all was scheduled such as how many cows were needed. No one knew that the Uprising would last two months. Thousands died. Everything was organized. There was enough water. When they heard the planes, they would have to see where the bombs were dropped. There were cannons mounted on trains which were so noisy that you could hear them coming. It sounded like cows so they called them cows. There were tunnels under main streets. The walls in the cellars were broken so you could walk from one cellar to another. You might have to change your direction of walking depending on the bombing. Homes were leveled.

105:00 Sometimes you could not walk far. One had to adapt. Sometimes she visited her father or he joined them at meals. Jadwiga seldom saw her sister who was at the hospital. Jadwiga stayed with her unit and brought water to fires. Occasionally she saw her family. Sometimes she went on rounds with her father. A book was published about her father's experiences, orders and progress. After a month she realized that the Uprising was not successful.

110:00 The Russians offered some help from the West such as ammunition. It was too costly to get help from the English. During the first month, they were not sure what was going to happen. They counted on the Russians to make a move. The Russians stopped fighting the Germans on their way to Berlin. The Russians lost men and ammunition. The Germans decided to destroy the city. During the second month, the Poles decided to continue and do what they could though things were not going well. All the young people were fighting. They learned of capitulation and all held together. The Germans had their own plan. Everyone had to leave and were told how they would be taken to a camp.

115:00 Jadwiga and her sister were considered soldiers and they were organized. She helped put out the fires and her sister worked in the hospital. Her mother was sick and was with the civilians. Jadwiga and her sister met at a certain place. Her father was with the leaders in a car. Her father got out and said, "Good-bye." The Germans directed them to camps. The next day they were loaded on cattle cars and taken to Germany. She went to a POW camp that was part of Bergen-Belsen. Jadwiga was fifteen. She was with her sister and a 13-year-old. They were liberated when the American Army approached. They were forced to march on the road. There was a youth camp where they stayed the night. The next day they heard shooting and knew the Americans were coming. The elders decided to meet them and tell them who they were. The Commandant of the entire Army signed the recapitulation in the name of the Underground Army. The Germans took it seriously.

120:00 Life was satisfactory in Bergen-Belsen. The men's and women's barracks were separate. Jadwiga had become an orderly and her sister a 2nd Lieutenant on their way to the camp. She and her sister were hidden in case someone mentioned their father. The older people from the Uprising were officers. There were about 100 of them. The rest went to another camp. She met POWs from England and France. As an orderly, she cooked with six others for the officers.

125:00 It was unusual that there were women POW with officers and other women soldiers. They honored the Uprising as a war event. They were treated as POW. In April and May '45 they had to march as British flyers.

127:00