

The hardest part of my job.

Tell me when.

Yep.

OK. This is-- one more time. No, no, no. Hang on a second. I'm going to start the introduction.

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Cecylia Ziobro Thibault, on July 17, 2014, in Hernando, Florida. Thank you so much, Mrs. Thibault, for agreeing to speak with us today, for your willingness to share your experiences.

And I know that before we start the interview itself, you'd like to read something, make a statement about this process. So please go ahead.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my story with you about my childhood experiences. I am forever grateful and pleased that you still show interest in what happened so long ago. In my own words, I will give you an idea of what my mother and I endured in a Nazi labor camp in Germany during World War II.

It's still fresh in my mind. I remember names, faces, and places. It's not a myth, growing up in the Nazi labor camp. I'm speaking in memory of the millions of victims of the Holocaust, Polish priests, Polish nuns, civilians, and executed Polish soldiers in Russia and Germany.

Of course, I'm grateful to the American soldiers who gave up their young lives to save millions and us. I'm compelled to talk about my mother's and my experiences because more and more people deny Hitler's and Stalin's existence, their brutality, labor camps, death camps in Germany, Poland, and Russia during World War II.

Recently, fields of unmarked graves were discovered in Lithuania, Latvia, and the Ukraine. Cries from these graves and death camps are calling not to forget these suffering people. I have to speak for them and for myself, because some people deny the existence and the atrocities. And they claim that the Holocaust is a myth.

The Atlantic Museum Magazine of Reading, Pennsylvania said some time ago, there is no question that World War II was a world gone mad. What nerve of the former Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to say that the Holocaust is a myth. Going back to the history of mankind, Hitler's Nazis and Stalin's communists were the cruelest and they killed millions innocent people worldwide from 1938 to 1945.

Thank you. Can we stop?

That's the reason for this book.

Hang on a second. Could you show the book that you wrote? Right here lift it a little bit higher so it's in the frame. Thank you. So a lot of what is in that book is what we will talk about today.

Correct.

So I'm going to start at the beginning. I'd like you to tell me, what was your name at birth, where were you born, and what was your date of birth?

My name is Cecylia Ziobro Thibault.

Mhm.

I was born June 1, 1934 in Ropczyce, a small village in Poland.

Where in Poland would it be? Where in Poland is this small village?

Near Debica, near Rzeszow, near Krakow.

In that area?

It's on the East. It's about 250 miles from Ukraine.

OK. Is it in Western Poland, Eastern Poland, central?

Eastern.

In Eastern Poland, OK. And how do you say the village again?

Ropczyce.

Ropczyce.

Yeah.

OK. And your name at birth was not Thibault, was it?

No, I married Robert Thibault.

OK. So at birth, when you were born, what were you baptized as?

Cecylia Ziobro.

Cecylia Ziobro.

Yeah. It's got a lot of nicknames, Cecylia. It's got Celina, Celcia. They call me different nicknames.

Which one was the one that was the most common?

Celinka.

Celinka. It's very pretty. It's very, very pretty. Tell me a little bit about your family, your mother's name, your father's name, and we'll take it from there.

My mother was born Maria Regina Rogulska in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, March 12, 1916.

So she was American?

She was American. Yes. And my father was baptized Adalbertus Ziobro. Adalbertus, which is Wojciech, they called him. Wojciech or Wojtek.

He was born in July 1900. And he was a World War I veteran.

So that meant he was very, very young when he fought in World War I.

Right. About 15, 16.

Tell me how did it come to be that your mother was born in the United States? Tell me that story a bit.

Because there was a famine in Europe. And my grandmother wanted, in the worst way, to come to America. Because her brother had left for America for a better life. So she was in her 20s and decided to come to America on the boat.

Was she married?

No. She was single. And she came to Pennsylvania and, of course, found work and the husband. And then she started a family. And she had as many as five children.

That's a lot.

Yes. My mother was the third one in that line up of children.

Do you know approximately when your grandmother came to the United States, came to America? Was it before the--

In the '20s. In the '20s.

In the 1920s?

Yes.

But if your mother was born here-- when did she come to America from Poland, not go back?

I don't know exactly. But I know my mother was born here in 1916.

OK. So maybe 1920 she came, something like that.

Excuse me. The dates don't match. If she came in 1920 to the United States, your mother couldn't have been born here four years earlier.

No. I'd say in the mid-20s.

I still have to stop. She probably, I would assume, came to the States before World War I, your grandmother?

No. I think it was after.

Then how could your mother be born in the United States in 1916?

Was your mother born in 1916, honey?

Yes.

Well, they were already in the United States at least three years before that.

Yeah.

So it must have been that she came in--

1928, maybe?

Honey, before 1916, at least three years before 1916. They had to be here if your mother was born in 1916. She was the third child.

Right. Well, I'm not so sure about the dates when she came.

When she came to the US?

Yes, my grandmother, I'm not sure when she came. But I know that my mother was born, I know for sure, here.

Probably came 1912, 1913, something like that.

OK.

Yeah.

Early 1900s, I think, which should be good enough.

And what do you know of your grandfather, the husband she found here in the United States?

I know very little. I never met him. Because she married him here. And then three times, she went back and forth with her children to Poland because she wanted to live in Poland, not here. She didn't like it here.

And did your mother, did she tell you-- did your mother ever tell you stories about her father, about her grandfather?

Yes. That he was very loving. She loved her father. And in fact, when the last time they were leaving for Poland, he asked my mother to stay with him. But mother wouldn't let that happen. So she had to go and leave for Poland for the last time. They were going back and forth three times.

And that's a lot. I mean, and it's also rather expensive.

Right. That's what amazes me. Where did that money come from.

Where did they get the money from? Were they well-to-do?

No. No. That's why they went searching for work here.

What kind of work?

Any kind of work. My grandfather worked at the coal mine. And my grandmother used to clean homes. Because of course, they were not educated.

And in Poland, it was, again, just the farm that my grandmother bought when she went back to Poland. And it wasn't much. They had to work their land by themselves. They couldn't afford a horse or machinery. So it was very, very poor living.

So tell me about the village itself that you were born in. What was it like? How many people were in there? Describe it for me.

There was mostly farm community. It was called Gnojnica, by the way. Because it was up the hill and it was removed from the Ropczyce town, which had schools, churches, and the government, and libraries.

But we lived in Gnojnica, which is the farm community. So there's only farmers living there.

Was it a large village?

It was pretty spread out. But as a child, I have no idea how far it was spread out. And farmers had horses that were a little better off, whereas my grandmother and my mother never had any horses, just cows and the little piece of land which they worked to produce food.

Why would your grandmother have wanted to come back to a place that was so poor?

I know. I have no idea.

Did that mean that she split from her husband?

Well, he was drinking. And they didn't get along too well. And so the last thing they did was to split up. And in fact, he promised to come back to Poland. And as soon as he earned enough money to come back, he would.

But he didn't succeed, because he got diabetic. And the doctors wanted to amputate his legs. And he wouldn't hear of it. So he died in 1944.

He died. And so your grandfather was alive after you were born. But you never saw him?

I never saw him. No.

Did he ever write letters to your mother, to your grandmother?

Not really. Because they didn't have education. So they hardly knew how to write. Once in a while, my grandmother wouldn't hear from him, but very seldom. I never got excited of, oh, there's a letter from grandpa, no. Never.

Well, it's a very hard life for a woman on her own.

Mhm. Very.

And not having a horse to be able to plow the fields.

Yes.

And yet she chose that above staying here?

Yes, she did. Because eventually she finally found a lover over there who fathered three more children of hers. So how many children did she have in total?

About eight, altogether.

Oh, my goodness.

But then the lover changed his mind because the money wasn't coming in from America. So he abandoned them.

Oh, my. So she was dependent on money coming in from the United States?

Yes. And then my grandfather, somebody wrote to him that my grandmother had a lover. He stopped sending money. So all that was lost.

And she then had eight children.

Right. So the children, being that they were Americans, weren't forced to go to school. So she rented them out to farmers to produce food and money for the rest of the family.

So the five children who were born in the United States didn't have to go to school. But the three who were born in Poland did?

No. Two of them were born here and one of them was born in Poland. So one of them went to school.

Only one?

That's Helen. Yes. She's still living she is in a nursing home. She was my favorite aunt. She lives in a nursing home in Washington, New Jersey.

Mhm. And what were the names of the other siblings, your other aunts and uncles?

The oldest was Walter, Genevieve, Maria, my mother, then Julia, and then came the twins, John and Jeanine, and Aunt Helen. And the second oldest died when he was in his infancy.

OK. And so everybody but Aunt Helen was hired out to work for other farmers?

Yes. She was the youngest, so she wasn't old enough to work. But the others were hired out. But then after she was old enough, she was hired out, too.

So did the older kids get any education at all?

No. No. They just learned how to write read and write at home.

That was pretty tough.

Mhm.

Did they complain about this? Did they want to go to school?

My mother went to school when she was in the States. So she had some education until she was 12. And Uncle Walter did, too. And Genevieve did a little bit.

But the others didn't. They hardly knew how to sign their name.

Oh, how sad. When the kids were amongst each other, did they speak Polish?

Only Polish at home, yes.

Only Polish. Did all of them, the older ones, also know English?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

By the time they got to be teenagers, they must've forgot how to speak English. Because that's all they heard was-- because my mother till the end spoke a broken English. And she wasn't well-versed in English.

So that meant that even in her first 12 years, she hadn't had much opportunity to really learn English as a language, although she was in the United States.

Right.

Hm.

What kind of memories did your mother have of the United States?

Oh, she wanted to come back in the worst way. She loved her country. And she wanted to come back.

So before the war, my grandmother decided that her brother Walter should come first. Being that he is a man, he could earn more money and bring all of them to America. So where's the money going to come from?

Well, my mother had calves. So she sold a calf. And she paid for his trip to come to America. And he was supposed to bring us all there. And so happened there was a Depression when he got here. And he couldn't find work. And he couldn't bring anybody over because he was just--

Trying to survive.

Support himself.

Yeah.

Trying to support himself.

Where did he end up when he came to the States? Did he go back to where his father was?

He went to Niagara Falls. Is that where your grandfather was?

Yes. Because he moved from Pennsylvania to Niagara Falls because there was work there.

OK. What kind of work?

What he did in Niagara Falls, I have no idea. I would think that would be something with mining, again.

OK. But you don't know for sure?

I don't know for sure.

And I guess when your grandfather found out that the three children weren't his, did he then abandon any plans?

He stopped sending money to my grandmother.

What was her name, by the way?

Pardon?

What was your grandmother's name, by the way?

Maria.

Your grandmother also was Maria? And what was her maiden name.

Lis, L-I-S.

Maria Lis.

Maria Lis. Her mother died when she was nine years old. And she had a stepmother who was treating her very badly, beating up on her and stuff. So she didn't have good memories as a child. And I guess that demeanor remained in her for the rest of her life, because she wasn't kind to her children, either.

That was going to be my next question, is what kind of relationship did she have with her children? What kind of memories do you have of her?

I remember my uncle John, from the second affair, very bitter towards his mother, always in fights with his mother.

Really?

The others were resenting her, but not-- I never saw them hugging their mother, or loving their mother, kissing on the cheek, never. It was just arguing.

Really?

She was beating up on the kids if they didn't do something. So it was not a pleasant place to grow up in.

I can't imagine it. But it sounds that way.

What about your mother? What did she tell you about your grandmother? How did she explain?

Well, she never told me anything. She just took it as it is. That's the life.

Mhm. When she went back at age 12 to Poland, was she hired out pretty soon as a young, adolescent, teenage girl?

Yes. Because she needed to provide food for the rest of the family. And that was in 1928. So no talk of school, no talk of anything else?

But my grandmother did arrange a marriage between my father and her daughter Maria. My mother was 17 when my grandmother decided to arrange the marriage with a next door neighbor, who was my father, Wojciech Ziobro. He was 33 years old.

So this was 1933?

This was 1933. They got married. Yes.

And tell me a little bit, you said earlier that Adalbertus is the same as Wojciech.

Wojciech, yes. Adalbertus is the Latin name. Because if you are of Catholic religion, you always had the saints' names.

Oh, so Wojciech was his Polish name and Adalbertus was his baptized name.

Right. The Latin name.

Got it. Mhm.

So they got married. And a year later, in 1934, June 1, I was born. And everybody was hovering over me, I understand.

That's nice. That's nice. Particularly if your grandmother was not somebody who hovered over her children.

Well, she did like me more than she liked her children, I think.

Really?

Hm.

Was she ever mean to you? Were you frightened of her?

No, never. Never mean. But there was a time later, when I was older, there was a time when she kicked us out of her house because my mother wouldn't let her milk our cow because she said she needs the milk for her children. And so



she kicked us out of the house. That was in 1942.

OK. We'll come to those times.

Right.

Tell me a little bit about your father. Who was your father?

He was sickly. Because he was in World War I, and working in trenches. He caught a cold and got inflammation of the kidneys. And in those days, they didn't have any medicine for kidneys, especially in Poland. And so he suffered and suffered with his pain. And when he was married, he tried to build a new home for me and his wife.

For your mom?

Because he lived with his parents. And so he didn't want all of us to live with his parents. So he tried to gather wood and he would go into the fields and woods and look for wood and stones, you know, was piling his stuff to build a new home. And his sickness got to the point where he couldn't finish building his home.

So after he died in 1937 at 37 years old, my grandmother asked my mother to move in with her.

So move back to her home?

Yes. To live with grandma. And the other home was just dismantled. And so did you let me understand this.

When your mother got married, did she move into not only her husband's home, but her in-laws' home?

Right. So she lived together with her in-laws?

Right, for a short time.

And then what happened?

And it was a home made from a stable. It was a stable but they converted it into a home which wasn't as warm in the winter. And that's why my father started building a new home for us.

Do you have any memories of your father? You were such a little girl when he died?

Yes, I do. In fact, when he was sick, lying down in the garden on the [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH], a feather comforter. You know, everybody had a feather comforter in Europe, because there was no heat in the house. So when he was lying down, resting under a tree, everybody else was out at work in the fields.

I decided I wanted to make him feel better. So I wasn't three yet, quite three yet. I decided to pick all his strawberries that he had planted green strawberries put it in my apron that will make him feel better. He will be able to get up and walk.

So when he sees me with those green strawberries, I said here, Daddy, that will make you feel better. I called him [POLISH]. That's daddy in Polish. Here, Dad. [POLISH] will make you feel better and then, you know, excited.

And he says, come closer. Come closer. And when he sees those green strawberries, oh, my goodness. I can just imagine. He says see that stick over there? Give it to me.

And I'm thinking why does he want that stick when I brought him some goodies. He grabs that stick and he gives me a beating, like you-- I never had before. He says you don't pick green strawberries. And that's when I found out that you have to wait till they're red.

Oh. So every time I eat strawberries now, I think of my father. Not that I don't think--

Yeah, other times.

Other times, but--

Well, that sounds like a rather harsh thing to do.

So I ran to the field and cried and complained to my mother after that. And she calmed me down and explained to me not to pick green strawberries.

Well, was your father a person that you were frightened of?

No, I wasn't afraid of him till then. But after that, he was always in bed and very uncommunicative, you know? Because he was really bad.

He was sick?

Sick, very sick. He was fidgeting in his bed constantly because he couldn't find the right position to lie down because he had this terrible backache constantly. So he was always fidgeting in bed, moaning with pain.

This was an arranged marriage?

Right.

How did your parents get on? How did your mother get on?

My mother spoke very fondly of her husband.

Of your father?

Yes, my real father. She spoke very fondly how he provided. He was a shoemaker besides being in the war. So he was fixing the shoes or making new shoes for the whole village. And he made so many shoes for my mother, like she'd never had before. She only had that pair of shoes. But now she had plenty of shoes.

That's quite something. A lot of people didn't--

From scratch, he would make you a pair of shoes.

Did he make some for you?

I don't know. I don't remember. All I remember was roaming around the fields barefoot most of the time.

Well, most kids were. Most kids were. I remember hearing stories of, sometimes, people who would want to go to church. And there'd be many children in the family, but only one pair of shoes. So they would have to take turns as to who wore the shoes to go to church.

Yes.

Those are hard times.

Oh, yes.

So it's a big deal to have a pair.

Oh, yes.

So you say that she spoke very fondly of him.

Yes.

And did you see them interact with one another?

No.

No. Well, you were three years old. How would somebody remember?

No. I didn't.

Yeah.

I didn't even see them hug or kiss. Never. Of course, that's not done in front of the children in those days.

Yeah. What about your mother? What kind of a person was she?

Was she somebody who you felt safe with? Was she somebody who was more like your grandmother? Tell me a little bit about her personality.

Well, my mother was very outgoing. She loved fun. She loved dancing and singing.

So after a day's work, she was always getting ready to go someplace, to visit her friends who had a harmonica. And they would play songs. And they would dance to.

Well, I didn't like that too much, my mother going out almost every day to be with her friends. And I begged her not to leave. Stay with me. But she always left.

And oh, that created so much friction between my mother and me. Because I would scream on top of my lungs every time I saw the door shut. And she was gone.

I made sure she heard me through the walls and through the windows. I screamed so loud. It never bothered her. Her fun was more important than me.

Oh. Was this after your father died that she went out?

Yes.

So when she was with him, did she go out? No.

No. No.

OK.

So one time I was so frustrated that she didn't listen to my plea that-- she had long hair all along because my father wouldn't let her cut her hair. But when he died, she cut her hair and put the braid in the closet. So one time after all that screaming I did in front of my grandmother. I took that braid out of the closet, and I would twirl it on the floors.

I said, see [NON-ENGLISH]? Grandmother, see grandmother? My mother's head is jumping. That's my mother's head

is jumping. And my grandmother would go ha, ha. She laughed so hard.

OK. So you were angry with your mother?

But she was consoling. My grandmother, when I was little, she would be consoling me. I think, at times, I liked my grandmother more than I did like my mother.

Really?

Mhm.

Tell me a little bit about your grandmother's house. What did it look like?

Well, it had boards on the side, straw roof, and a wooden floor, which was very unusual for anybody in that village, to have a wooden floor. And next to it was a stable. There wasn't a separate buildings, all under one roof, the stable for the cows. So you walk, one huge room out of this room, which is a family room. And there would be beds here and there.

For all the eight children?

Yeah. There's some of them slept two, three, four in one bed. And so there was two windows on the North and a window on the side of the North windows. And the closets on side.

And there was not too much furniture. You were lucky you had beds. There was one table, not too many chairs. And of course, it was a wooden stove to heat, to cook on.

A wooden stove?

A wooden stove only, and no heat in the winter, no water. There was a well that led you to down the hill to get your water for the day or whenever you needed it.

I take it you didn't have electricity.

No.

And so no phone, no radio, nothing like that.

No, nothing, just sticks and stones to play with outside.

How many animals did your grandmother have?

Well, my mother had the cow and the calf. And my grandmother had a cow. And sometimes she had a calf. But the calf was, like, to sell it for to get some money for food. So they would always have a calf or two.

Did they have chickens?

Pardon? Chickens, yes.

Any goats?

Chickens and eggs.

Uh huh.

Any goats?

No.

OK.

No. Just the cows or the--

So it was the cows and chickens and no horses.

No horses. No.

So how much land did she have?

My grandmother had three acres. And my mother had an acre and a half, something like that, which was across the street from my grandmother. And my father's family, after he died, they wanted that land back, because--

That acre and a half?

Yes. Because they said that belongs to the Ziobro family, not the Rogulski family. And they constantly fought over it. So very seldom did my mother sow anything, any wheat on that land, because she was afraid of fights.

And then there was a fruit garden, which my father planted most of the trees that I went to pick fruit there.

Were you hungry as a child?

All the time. When my father was living, I don't remember being hungry. But after that, I remember being hungry.

So if you had a piece of bread and some water or milk, that was it for the day.

That's not a lot. It's not a lot at all.

I was like very skinny. My cheeks were not there.

They were sunken?

Sunken cheeks. Yes. I forget my words, you know? When you get to 80, you forget your words that you had before.

[LAUGHTER]

And now you forget them.

Well, sometimes you forget them even earlier than that.

Really? That is what my son tells me and my daughter.

Yes. You're not alone in that. So tell me a little bit about the village life itself was everybody Catholic in the village?

Yes.

There were no Protestant people?

I don't remember any Protestants, no. Because there were no Protestant churches. They were only Catholic churches around us. And there were quite a few Jews in Ropczyce.

Uh huh. That was my next question.

Yes, lot of Jews. And they had businesses, which provided work for most of the people that didn't have a lot of land to work. So my mother worked for a Jewish family, taking care of some children. My grandmother was cleaning. So that's how they substituted their income if they didn't have a good harvest at the field.

Did people in the village in Gnojnica talk about the Jews at all, about whether they're different from Catholics and so?

They did. Because they believe that Jews murdered Jesus. So that was the only hatred against the Jews they had.

OK. But it was-- it stemmed from that.

Pardon?

It stemmed from this, from religious belief.

Right. The hatred stemmed from that.

OK. And yet, what kind of experience did your mother or your grandmother have actually working with Jewish families?

Well, they had no choice. They figured, well, if I don't work there, I won't eat. So they just worked and came home.

Would they ever talk about the families they worked for?

Yes. Some of them were very nice, helpful. And a salesman that came to the house, to our village, tried to sell my grandmother things. And when she bought them and they broke, you know, like a broom she bought, the broom fell apart. So that's why she hated the Jews.

OK. Not only because they murdered Jesus Christ, but he sold her the broom that fell apart. You know? So for stupid reasons like that.

Yeah. Was your grandmother educated at all?

No.

Did she--

No. And did she value education or not so much? Or is--

Not so much. Because she didn't insist that her children go to school.

OK. Do you remember seeing Jewish people in Ropczyce? Is that the name of the--

Do I remember seeing what?

Jewish people. And when you were little? Did you see any Jewish people when you were little?

Yes. I saw them when they were came to the house. I saw the grown up selling stuff. But I saw the children when the war broke out in '39. Because when they were bombing Ropczyce, we were hiding. And then, after the bombs stopped, the next day we would go down the hill to visit the damage.

And we were heartbroken to see that the Jewish families were rounded up in the middle of the circle. Their homes were gutted. And the children were crying. And we just couldn't believe, you know, that something like this was happening.

So my mother would and my grandmother would go down the hill several times to bring them bread and buns. And after a third time, I think the German soldier would come to them and say, don't come anymore. Today is the Jews. And tomorrow will be your turn.

So where-- we're jumping ahead a little bit. But where were they? Were they still in their houses, or in some other place?

They were in the middle of the court. And a lot of German trucks were parked here and there. And we understand that they loaded them onto those trucks and took them away and we don't-- didn't know where until after the war we found out that there was Auschwitz. There was so many camps where they were rounding up the Jews.

So as a small child, you remember seeing some people come to the house and sell goods. Did you ever visit or accompany your mother or your grandmother when they went to work at these families?

No. No. No.

OK. So did you ever go to Ropczyce yourself?

Yes. Because that's where the church was. So there wasn't one in Gnojnica?

No. OK. How much distance was there between your village and the town?

I'd say about two or three miles. Would you walk?

Walk every time. Every Sunday?

Yes. And I went to-- started school there. But in-- as you know, September 1, 1939, Hitler invaded Poland. And my school days were very short. Because there were trucks that they were picking up children out of school, hauling them away just like the Jews.

And the parents didn't know what happened to their children. And apparently, they were taking them to their laboratories, taking blood. So they have enough blood for their wounded soldiers, for the German wounded soldiers.

How did you find this out?

Later, after the war. We didn't know what was happening.

So were the children-- was it-- were the children released? Or were they-- or were taking the blood--

We never heard from them again. And they were-- we were told after the war that they were doing experiments on those children. And in fact, when I worked for a newspaper in New York City, for a Polish language newspaper, women came in for an interview to show their scars. Everywhere they were full of scars. Because when they were children, they were being-- I forget my word again.

It's OK.

The scars were due to what kind of--

- The doctors, the German doctors were doing experiments on those children.

And so these were these--

Taking the blood and giving it to their wounded soldiers. So they were giving an interview for this Polish language

newspaper.

And this is well after the war, when you're in the States?

After the war, yes. I worked for the newspaper in 1953 when I graduated from high school. I was a bookkeeper, a receptionist, bookkeeper.

And I saw these women. And they showed me the scars on their legs. They lifted the skirts up to show how scarred their legs were and their arms.

You were just over five years old when the war started.

War started, yes.

Do you have any memories of that, of the war?

Yes. I remember hiding under a tree because Germany was bombing Ropczyce. But no soldiers came to our town, only in Ropczyce and to our farmland. Because it wasn't a town.

It was farmland. It was Gnojnica. And it was up on the hill.

But few days, a few days later, we started seeing them with their machine guns and inspecting people's homes and stuff.

Did they come to your grandmother's house?

No, they didn't. OK. Did you see them in Ropczyce itself?

Yes. Oh, yes. It was filled. When we went down to see the damage they did by bombing, we saw terrible damages.

My school was bombed. The church was bombed. And there was wall to wall German soldiers and tanks. It was scary.

Did any of them notice you or your parent-- or your mother or your grandmother? When you went to Ropczyce, did you go with an adult?

Yes. Oh, yes.

OK. So did any of them notice you or not, the German soldiers?

They didn't talk to us. No.

Did you notice them behaving towards other people in some ways?

Yes. They were.

What did you see?

Well, I saw them beating the Jews if they didn't obey to go onto the truck and forcing them onto the truck. But I didn't see any Polish people being hit with a gun. Because we were like in awe, couldn't believe it.

So you were in a state of shock.

Yes.

Mhm. Those must be very hard memories for a little girl to have, you know, to be so-- I can't imagine it. You know,



you're five years old. And your world is one way. And all of a sudden--

All of a sudden, it changed. It was unbelievable.

Did you feel scared?

All the time, like never before. We were scared because we never knew when the Germans would break into our house, into my grandmother's house, really.

And had you ever felt fear like that before?

No, never. Our house was never locked. You went to church and never locked your home.

How did things progress? What happened after the first--

Well, when-- a year went by. In 1940, my mother gets a notice from the German occupation government stating to get ready to be shipped to Germany. So my mother gets a notice, goes to the government, and says, well, I can't go. I have a small child. And I have an old mother to take care of. I can't go.

And they said, we're not asking you. We're telling you. If you don't obey our orders, you and your child will be separated, and you'll have to go there anyways. You'll go on the farm or a factory to work.

And so my mother had no choice. She came home and packed a small suitcase. And my father's brother, John, drove us in his horse and buggy to the train station.

So you went with her?

Yes. I went with her. Because she decided to go right there and then. And then we took a train to Krakow. And we reported to the place where the notice told us. My mother had that notice with her.

So until Krakow, from Ropczyce to Krakow, she was traveling like a civilian?

Right.

OK.

And so we reported to the school. And that school had hundreds of people in it, young, middle aged, children, everybody was crying. And the German soldiers parading, watching over us with their German shepherd dogs, which I was terribly afraid of dogs because a dog almost bit me when I was three or four years old.

And so we were told what to do. We were marched like soldiers from one place to the other. And we were told what to do, like, you're going to this place that they take showers.

Well, there were hundreds of women and children, my age and older. Disrobe, and you're taking a shower, because you're being shipped to Germany. So haircuts, examinations if we had any disease.

Because they wanted to send healthy people to work their farms and factories. So my mother's hair was cut. And my hair was short, so we didn't have to go through that.

But as a six-year-old. You're six years old when this happened.

Six-years-old. And it was in the fall of 1940 that we were shipped to Germany. And of course, some mothers had boys with them. So these boys are stuck in the shower room, huge room like this. And it was full of showers, showerheads.

And they're stuck with these women, naked women. And the boys eyes were big, you know, because they'd never seen. My eyes were big.

We never saw a naked woman before. So we were like smirking, you know? And after the shower, we had to go to a doctor to be checked and stuff like that to be shipped to Germany.

And in the meantime, we had to sleep on the floor on straw. There was no beds.

Were they feeding you? Did they feed you?

They feed us. I don't remember ever eating there anything, maybe a piece of bread. And then the next morning, we were put on the cattle train to be shipped to Germany. It was like standing room only.

And I was small. And all the people were tall. So I couldn't see anything outside. All I could see was the ceiling I stood under. Did people wear different clothes or did they wear the same clothes that they had come in with?

The clothes they had on when they were told to report there. And of course, I only had one change of clothes, my mother, two. We didn't have-- couldn't afford much clothing. So it was a small suitcase for both of us.

And so without any water or food we were on that train. I don't know how many hours from Krakow to a town called Possneck.

Possneck.

Possneck. And then, you walked to the farm community from this town. It was East Germany, which is not far to Poland, maybe four hours by train or something like that.

So all of a sudden, the German soldiers are yelling, everybody--

(YELLING IN GERMAN) [GERMAN] Everybody [SPEAKING GERMAN]. Yelling and yelling, and with their dogs roaming around. So they opened that sliding door. And we started jumping down to the ground. Everybody gets out.

So I look at the train. And it's long, long train of people coming out of that train. And then we look that way, and there's all sorts of German farmers looking us over. And they had a choice to pick.

So this farmer wearing boots over his knees, because he was, you know, hunting or fishing. But I was amazed at the boots he had over his knees, clean cut. And he had a stick in his hand. And he pointed the stick at my mother.

So my mother comes forward. And I'm holding on to her, of course. And he tells us to go into his horse and buggy. So he brings us to his farm and brings us to our headquarters where we were supposed to stay, like a barracks. Three floors, because all these workers were living there already when we got there.

Other Polish workers?

Other Polish workers were already there. And so I don't know if we were Fed that day or whether they gave us a piece of bread. I don't remember.

But the next day, my mother was-- oh, they brought us to the second floor where our room was. No heat, just a wood burning stove, no water. The well was, like, a 10 minute walk.

And so my mother was told the next morning to report in the courtyard. Every farmer had a courtyard with a pile of manure. And the bigger the manure, the better off the farmer was. That means he was rich.

And the manure pile was right in front of our window. And the courtyard had a gate that was closed for the night. But

every morning, it was open because the animals had to come out and the workers had to report in the middle of that courtyard.

I want to stop for a second. That farmer's name, do you remember it?

Yes. But in the book, we changed it. Because our son found out that it's better to change the names. I'm wondering if I should give you the name, the real name? Or if I should give you the fictitious name?

Well, why would you-- tell me why you thought that you should change his name in the book?

Because our son said he was afraid of a lawsuit.

I see.

Because none of the Germans admit to having workers work their farms or any place else.

And did you-- were you able to establish-- no. Well, we'll talk about that in a minute. Was your son able to establish that the family still lived? That there still were descendants of the farmer? Does he know that?

Yes, because he went to Sweden with his wife. And then, at Christmas, they were busy with-- his wife was busy with her family. So he decided to take a few days and go to Possneck and to Dobritz, is the farm community called Dobritz.

Dobritz.

And he went to Possneck and asked which way is it to Dobritz. So they pointed it out, because a lot of people spoke English, he said. They pointed the way to Dobritz. So when he got to Dobritz, he went to-- I think it was a bar, he says, because they were drinking, playing cards.

And he asked, again, in English, where would--

This particular farm?

--this particular family live. I'm so tempted to tell you.

Well I'm not saying we shouldn't. But I want to know first this part of the story. So he went to the bar, your son, and they asked?

They said, oh, sure. Come on. And they showed him which house it was. So he went to the house. And of course, the gate was closed. The courtyard was in the middle.

He knocks on the wooden gate. And finally, somebody comes running out. And he speaks English. And everybody in there spoke English.

So he said, oh, that's good. He says, where could I meet Paula, which is the daughter of the--

Person? The farmer?

Yeah, of the first farmer that picked us up.

Oh, Paula's over there. She was by the stable across the courtyard. And her children, two sons, I think, and grandchildren came to the gate. And they're talking English.

And my son tells them that my mother and I were here during the war. My mother was working on their farm and stuff. And I got to liking Paula, because she was the only one that was nice to me out of all the German kids.

I was, like, 6, 7, 8. And she was 13, 14, 12, 13, 14, very pleasant person all the time. And the kids pointed to her that she's over there.

And they called her over to come to the gate. And so she came over. She didn't speak English.

But she kept talking to her sons and the grandchildren that we have no time. This is Sunday. We have no time.

We have a lot of work. I don't remember Cecylia. I don't know Cecylia. So the children translated that to my son.

And he got the message right away. That they-- she doesn't want to admit to anything. That she knew.

But I said to my son, if I was 6, 7, I remember her, and she was 12, 13, she doesn't remember me? That's odd.

Yeah.

So he left talking to them and thanking them for their time. And so he went back to Sweden. And when he came back, he brought me some books about Possneck. And of course, they're in German. So I only recognize one picture on the face of the book, of the circle that had a fountain in it. And--

You mean, like, the town square, which had fountain?

A square like. Yes. And the fountain in the middle of it, because Paula once was going to the city. And she asked me to come on the horse and buggy so she would have someone to ride the horse to the city.

And I was so glad. Because I never had that in Poland, you know, horse and buggy. So that was exciting.

So she says to me, stay in the carriage. I'll be right out. I'm going to go over here. I don't know. I don't remember where she went into.

And in the meantime, the horse was spooked by somebody that he started going around and around in circles. And nobody could stop him. I didn't know how to stop a horse from running. So finally, when he came to a point where he had to slow down. I jumped off the carriage and cried and cried. And finally, Paula came out and took over.

And stopped the horse.

And stopped, well, the horse was stopped already. Because he came to a point where he couldn't move. He came too close to the homes and stuff.

And was this-- what the picture that you recognized? You said you recognized only one picture with the fountain?

Yes.

And this was the scene, near that fountain?

In Possneck, yes. I have a few pictures of a garden in Dobritz. There was a fruit growing in there. And we had taken the picture when we first got there.

But in any case, going back to--

So--

My mother reported in the morning at 6 o'clock to go to work.

--before we go back there, you got this-- Possneck, you say, was in the part of Germany that became East Germany.

Yes.

What larger town or city was it closer to? Was it close to Leipzig or Dresden?

Yes. Leipzig, Dresden, Gera.

Gera. It was near Gera?

Yes.

OK. Do you know about how many kilometers it would have been from Gera?

I have no idea.

OK. But it was in this general area.

Yes. Always in East Germany.

OK.

Though at the time that you were there, it was one country.

One country, correct.

OK.

And that was the only contact that your son had with the family?

With them, yes. And he had some contact on his computer with them. They were pretty friendly for a few months. And they even sent a picture of Paula to him, which he gave it to me.

Did you recognize anything from her?

No. Because I know her when she was 13, 14. And now she is an old lady. She's in her 80s. And now maybe in her 90s. Because it was, like, a few years ago that he went there.

And all of a sudden, the communications stopped with her sons. And he says we were really getting friendly. And I said, Bob, she probably told them the truth, what really happened during the war.

And the sons can't take that. So I said they are ashamed, maybe, that it happened on their farm. And I said, that's why they don't want to correspond with you anymore. And he says, well, one of the sons left and went to live somewhere in another country. So that's all we know.

OK. And because of this experience, when your son was tracking down and looking for the family and looking for the place where you were, you decided not to use the real name of the family.

Right.

In the book.

Because he was told that they could come out and sue him for writing this book with the real names.

And do you know who told him that?

I don't know.

Was it somebody in Germany or somebody here?

Somebody here.

OK. OK.

A lot of people that were working the farms, I hear that they went back to Germany to see where they were. And the Germans thought that they wanted their land back that they used to work. So a lot of them denied that they had any workers.

But this particular family, I think it was in the newspaper, too, that they said to the couple, we don't have any children. And you worked so wholeheartedly, our land, and you worked our farm, you can have that when we're gone. You can have everything that we own as yours after we're gone.

Oh. So that was one of those examples or exceptions where people actually offered their farms--

Right.

--to a family?

So apparently, maybe, she heard about it and didn't want to have anything to do with that.

Well, you know, you're left with speculation. When you don't have information, you really don't know what the reason is. But yes, it does seem-- it seems very odd and a little strange. If they did have a communication, if your son was in communication with them, and then all of a sudden it stops.

Yeah.

And did this communication happen after he met them?

Yes. After a few months, after he came back to the States.

I see.

They were communicating on the computer and Skype and stuff like that.

Really? Even that much? And then it just stopped. OK. Well, then let's go back to the first night that you're there.

Tell me then, at least for this time, what is the name you gave the farmer and his family in the book? What did you call-- what is the fictitious name?

Fictitious name? I don't remember this fictitious name. That's why I had to write it down.

OK.

Heinrich. Heinrich.

That is his first name?

That's his fictitious first name, yes.

And what is his fictitious last name?

We didn't go that far.

OK. OK. So--

Because I gave him everything like it was. Then when he surprised me that we had-- he had to change names, I couldn't remember. So I had to write it down.

OK. All right.

And also he changed a little bit of the geography that was in my original--

Manuscript?

Yeah, manuscript. Then he changed it to giving approximate area, not exactly.

OK. Let's go back to that first day. Your mother has to report--

At 6 o'clock in the morning.

--at 6 o'clock in the morning. What was she given to do?

She and the other workers, like, 10 or 15 other workers were distributed work to go either to pick potatoes, or milk the cows, or clean the stables. Because he had a lot of horses in the area where we lived. But within 10 minutes, across the pond, he had his house where the cows were.

And then they needed to be milked. They never went outside because there were too many. And the fields were too far away for them to bring the cows to the fields. So they were fed right there.

The horses, he took the horses out whenever he needed a horse to attach to this cart there, when he was going on a trip. And so my mother was gone all day, from 6:00 in the morning till 6:00, 7:00 at night before I saw her again. And at six years old, I was left alone in the house.

In your small room?

In a small room--

I'm sorry [INAUDIBLE]. I'm going to have to have you-- I'm starting to get a little bit of break through.

They were cleaning stables.

OK. Let's start--

Milking cows.

And so your mother was gone from-- 6:00 in the morning till 6:00, 7:00, or 8:00 at night, depending on what was needed to be done at the fields.

And you were left alone? I was alone on my own, to feed-- to feed myself. At first, they were feeding us once or twice a day, soup and bread. And when I saw her, she came back from work so tired that she could hardly utter anything to me. It was just going straight to bed.

And it went on for a while. And then--

OK. I'm sorry.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

I'm sorry I'm interrupting. But I want to get a sense of the farmer's personality, this Mr. Heinrich. What kind of a person-- was he very brusque when he took you and your mother from the train station?

Was he matter of fact? Was he arrogant? Did he yell at you? Tell me how he behaved.

He behaved very kindly. In fact, I thought he liked me as a child. He never yelled. Because he had a Polish foreman who took care of the yelling--

I see.

--and distributing the work. He was only there whenever the foreman needed him to be there. So that went on for a while.

And then one time the foreman says to the workers, you're not working fast enough, not producing enough. You have to work faster and harder.

And so my mother spoke up and says, if you feed the people better, they will be stronger and work harder. So the foreman punched my mother in the face. Blood comes running out. She's screaming.

I'm in bed at 6 o'clock in the morning. I look out the window. I see my mother on the ground, full of blood. So I ran out, trying to comfort her.

But she calmed me down. And she says, I'll be all right. Just go back to to bed, to sleep, and I'll see you in the evening.

And my life, my day was very disturbing that day. I was so nervous.

Because you didn't know what happened.

Being alone.

Yeah.

Not speaking the language well. Every day I was bullied by the kids when they came back from school.

What kids were these?

These were kids, German kids, and they was the foreman's kids. I think they went to school, to German school, because I didn't see them all day long, only, like, in the afternoon.

So when they came from school, they would play tricks on me. Which I was very gullible and I followed. Like, one time they said, want to come swim with us? I said, I don't know how to swim. I don't have a bathing suit.

They would dress in their bathing suit and stuff. And I said, I can't go. Well, come on.

We'll teach you. We'll teach you. You're all right the way you are.

So I went with my dress, followed them to the lake. The lake was green with algae and stuff. And they said, you know, you can walk from here to there with no problems. So I believed them.



When I got to the middle, my feet didn't touch--

The bottom?

--the bottom. And I panicked. So I started flapping my hands and swallowing water when I see them laughing and running off. I was there all alone.

So I paddled my way to the other side, sat down till my cough was gone. And the water out of me was gone. I went back home shaking, I was so afraid. And I said, oh, I'll never go with the German kids out again.

And when my mother came, I couldn't wait for her to come at night to tell her what I went through. So she made me feel better. And I promised myself not to go with the kids. But being all day in that one room, nothing to do, no toys or anything, you found yourself going out and--

Just looking what's going on.

Yes. Then all of a sudden the kids come around, and, Oh, did you know that there's little chicks in the chicken coop? You want to come with us to hold them. And oh, that should be nice.

As long as there is no water around me, I was so scared of water from there on. So they take me to that chicken coop. We run around, look at the chicks.

It was a huge chicken coop. And all of a sudden I find myself being locked up in that chicken coop. The smell is atrocious.

So they locked you in there?

Locked me in and left. And of course, the hatch was way up. I couldn't reach. It was outside the chicken coop, the hatch. And they left. So I'm running back and forwards, having a hard time to breathe.

And then saying, well, my mother won't find me. Maybe when she comes, she's going to start looking for me. She'll find me.

But in the meantime, I started investigating. And I see the chickens go in and out with that opening there. I said, oh, maybe I can go out through there.

So I went out this way. And my shoulders were holding me back. Then I said, what if I put my hands this way and just pushed my body out through that hole. It worked. Oh, it worked!

So I went back. I had a few raw eggs for dinner, whatever it was. Time to--

So you were able to find some eggs there?

Oh, yes. I drank those raw eggs. And I went out holding my hands down and pushing my body out, I got out. They never knew how I got out. So every time I was hungry, I went to the chicken coop and had some raw eggs.

[LAUGHTER]

How many Polish workers were there on that place?

I'd say at least 15. But they were also French prisoners of war and Russian prisoners of war that were working on the quarry. They were taking down a rock mountain, making it into asphalt, you know, grinding it--

So this farmer owned that quarry?

Yes. He owned that, too.

As well as the farm?

Yeah.

OK.

He was the richest one in that whole Dobritz area.

So did you have any interaction with these prisoners of war? Did the Polish workers have any interaction with them?

I don't know if they did, but I did. Because every time they marched them in front of our gate, I would stand there and watch them. And one time they looked so hungry and so deprived that I saved a potato for them that I picked in the field after the tractor went by and left some potatoes. I was able to bring that to our room.

So I had a few potatoes. So I brought that down and I was holding it behind me so that the German officers that were marching them didn't see me. So I waited till the last one, last prisoner was going by. I showed him the potato. And I came up to him, gave him the potato. And then there was the Russian and the French prisoners of war, they would march them in front.

And nobody saw you do it.

No. Nobody caught me doing it. So I did that a few times. And then my mother told me to stop because she says if you get caught, we'll be separated.

So my mother started getting sick after that beating she got. She couldn't work as fast as--

Before we go to that, that prisoner must have been very surprised.

Yes.

This little girl comes and gives him a potato.

Yes.

Did he react to it at all?

Smiled.

Yeah?

And I don't know what he told me in English, no, in Polish, or in Russian. I don't remember. He said even potato peels would do. So then I started saving potato peels.

OK.

And in your book, you say that they tried to return the favor. In your book, you write about this incident. And then you say that--

Yes, they gave me chocolate. Because they used to get rations from their families. They were allowed to get a package from Poland.

So they gave me a small chocolate. And I never tasted chocolate before. So when I tasted it, it was like heaven. Oh, my God. So I got more enthused about bringing more potatoes.

And is that when your mother said enough already?

Yes. Yes. That's when she said that's enough. Because I'll get caught and then we'll be separated. So then when she started getting sicker and sicker, she couldn't work as hard.

And so I don't know if she requested it-- oh, she requested one thing, though, before I go to that. She says can't you arrange for my daughter to go to school.

And the farm Heinrich said, Maria, you're not German. If you become German citizens, your daughter can go to school. And you can do anything you want, like a German citizen.

And my mother says, I'm an American born. And I will die an American. I will not change.

And the owner says, Maria, don't talk like that. You can get into a lot of trouble. But I didn't go to school.

I see.

And so when she got sicker and sicker, I don't know if she asked to be transferred to a smaller farmer, or whether she was just-- they arranged it, the Germans arranged to bring us to a smaller farm where the work was not as demanding and the farmer had three or four workers.

Before we go there, still with Heinrich and his farm, you mentioned another incident in the book that I'd like you to talk about a little bit. And that is the free time that the workers sometimes had.

Yes, on Sundays, afternoon, when the cows and the animals are taken care of. It was Sunday afternoon that people gathered in one room or another and played the harmonica and sang Polish songs. And all of a sudden, they hear the motorcycles come in. The SS running up the stairs, beating everybody, especially the men, because one of them was playing the harmonica.

The women, I didn't see beat up. But one guy, his teeth were knocked out, blood all over the wall. We told you no gathering. No gathering is allowed.

And they left. They beat up everybody and they left.

Did anybody die from their wounds?

No. No. They didn't. But they were bruised. Their faces were full of blood. And--

Swollen?

--swollen faces with teeth knocked out. So then they decided, well, since we can't meet in our rooms, what if we meet in the woods for Sunday afternoon. So one time we went, about 15 minute walk, 20 minute walk. And they would play the harmonica and sing and dance.

And we would watch the American planes go by. And I would think why can't one of those planes come down scoop us up and bring us to America? And that's how the days went by.

So who do you think-- I mean, it sounds like somebody must have reported this gathering.

That's right. So we don't know whether this was the Polish foreman who lived in the same building or whether there

were Germans that heard the singing and they reported that. We have no idea who reported that.

Do you think the owner would have, Heinrich?

Well, no. Because he lived across the village.

Oh, so he might not have heard it?

No. No. He didn't. But at another time, it was Easter time and we went to church on a Sunday. And I remember, as we entered, the church was not full.

But the priest was on the pulpit. In those days, they had pulpits where the priest says his sermon. And he sees us coming in. Of course, by then, we had raggedy clothes on. Because we didn't have too many clothes.

And we stood. We didn't go sit down. So we stood.

And all of a sudden, he stops talking and comes down the pulpit to meet us. And he says, you have to leave. My church will be closed if I let you stay.

And the reason he knew we were not German because we had to wear a P on our left shoulder. Everybody had a big P over there for Polish. And so we left.

What a horrible thing.

What can you do?

What a horrible thing. Yeah.

So then, on the small farm, I don't remember how we got there. It wasn't far from Dobritz. Because I was so undernourished that I was so weak. So I don't remember.

All I remember is walking up the mountain to that small farm. And I don't know the name of them. All I know is that she wanted me to call her Tante Lotte.

Who wanted you to call her?

The lady of the house, Tante Lotte, which means Aunt Lotte. Did you speak any German by this point?

By then, I spoke German very well. And so she had one older son already in the service. And one younger son that was, like, 14, that was in the youth group.

And my mother was mostly with the owner, going to the fields. And by then, my mother befriended a Polish guy who was also at the first farm. And they were living like husband and wife. And that's when I had a brother, Leon.

Was he born on the first farm?

No. We were given a pass to go to Poland. So he was born in Poland.

Really?

Yes.

That sounds so unusual.

Doesn't it? I can't believe it. And because my mother was American born, I soon found that they were treating the Americans different than the regular Polish people.

Also you found that out through research after the war?

Yes, after the war. And so after six months, we came back. And I was so elated that I had a little brother with me. I wasn't alone anymore.

And so when we went to the small farm, this man, which his real name is Joseph, my brother, and I, and my mother, we went to that small farm. And we were there.

What was Joseph's last name?

Brodacki.

Brodacki.

Yeah. I don't think that they're going to sue me. But in any case, he was with us till the end of the war.

OK.

And I took care of my brother while they were out in the field working. They had another Russian girl working there, my mother and Josef. So when they turned 10-years-old, the owner and the Tante Lotte says, we can't feed you anymore. You have to work along with the adults. Because you're 10-years-old.

So from age 6 to 10, I didn't work. I didn't have to work.

You didn't have to work. But from age 6 to 10, you were in a labor camp with your mother, basically.

Yes.

OK. And how did your mother's friend, Mr. Brodacki, how did he treat you?

He wanted me to call him daddy. But I refused. I said, I only had one daddy. So I called him Josef. He didn't like that. And so whenever I called him his first name, he would run after me with the stick, you know, and try to teach me to call him daddy.

So my aunt Julie was also in the labor camp with us. I don't remember how she got there. So she would say to him, leave Celinka alone. Leave her alone. She was sticking up for me.

But in any case, on that small farm, I was told we can't feed you. You have to work along the adults. OK.

So what do I do? Clean the stables. Feed the animals while we are out in the fields working. So besides taking care of my little brother, I had to take the cows to the field so I can clean the stable. There were about five, six cows.

And one time, one of the cows turned on me and she started chasing me. Oh, my God, was I scared. I went so fast to the nearest picket fence, rolled under it and stayed there for a few minutes because I was out of breath.

And then I was afraid to take the cows in the field anymore. Somebody else had to do that. So I came back to the stable, I took all the old manure out.

Well, first, I had to put it on the wheelbarrow. And first time I did that, I had wanted to do it fast, right? So I piled the manure so high that when I lifted it, the whole thing keeled over on me. I had to redo it all over again and pile only half of it so I could handle it.

So I did clean the stable, put new straw on so when the cows come back, they had nice and clean stable. Then I had to feed the geese, feed the chickens. Put new food for the cows into their little--

Trough?

Yeah. In front of them. And when they came to the end, my mother would come back from the field. And we would eat some soup and bread. Some soup and bread, that's all they fed us, soup and bread.

So this woman, the lady of the house who asked you to call her Tante Lotte, she didn't seem much of a Tante if you had to work.

No. No. And she had a garden that she had to pick fruit from. So she would always ask me to join her.

So she and I would fill up the stuff so that she could make preserves. But we never saw those preserves. It was always left for them in the cellar.

And one time she asked me to climb up a cherry tree. And she would have a dish hooked up onto a string that she would pull. And this dish would go up to me so I would fill it up. And then she would roll it down to empty it. And we would work together very well.

And my back was killing me at that time, because I didn't know I was getting sicker and sicker. And I wasn't working fast enough. So she got mad at me.

And the one time she says for me to come down. She's going to climb the tree, and I'm going to retrieve the fruit. I did that for a while.

And then all of a sudden, I can't even lift my arms to do that fast enough for her. So she comes down, real mad. And she says let's go inside.

And I can't get up. Because when I was on the ground, I couldn't sit up. So I lied down on the ground.

And all this time, I was working with my hands. I can't get up. And she thought I was faking. I said, no, I have so much pain in my back. I can't get up.

So she took me by my armpits, dragged me into the house. When my mother comes from work, can't do anything. What can they do? They had no medicine. They don't know what's wrong with me.

So in the morning, the farmer took pity on me because I was screaming and yelling all night long. Took me to the doctor's in horse and buggy. And every time that buggy was jumping from the farmland, from the roads, it was like knives in my back.

So we're standing in line to see the doctor. And German kids go by ahead of us, you know, because they knew we were not German. And they would laugh and giggle and would say, the Polish [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. The Polish pig can't even stand up on her feet. Because my mother had to hold me by my armpits.

So it come out turn to go to see the doctor. He examines me. And he says I have inflammation of the kidneys.

And he gave me medicine. And I started feeling better. And I don't remember if I had to work anymore in the-- but not long after that is when 1945 was approaching. And we heard the planes and bombings from that small farm.

And my mother was getting sicker, too, over there. And so she says, my daughter can't work. I can't work either. And would you ship us someplace else where we-- so they shipped us to down the hill to a factory where they were making rifle butts.

OK. At this point, I want to interrupt and go back a little bit.

Can we stop tape real quick? [INAUDIBLE].

OK. I want to go back and ask about this question that I had. You said that your mother was allowed to go back to Poland to have your little brother.

Right.

Why did she ever return to--

Because during the war, there was no food to have. And when my grandmother threw us out of her house, we were living in somebody else's house.

So your mother had the baby?

Had the baby and then they had one cow, and then one cow.

OK. And she had a fight with her mother, so her mother threw us out.

OK.

And she rented a house about half a mile North of where my grandmother was. And so when there was no food to feed the cow and the cow wouldn't give milk because you don't feed her, right? So we had nothing.

So I said to my mother, I said, mom, why don't we go back to the farmer like you promised? Because eventually, they're going to catch us that we're here and we're supposed to be there on the farm. So she listened to me. And we went back to Dobritz to that farmer. And he took us in with.

So I want to make-- I want to understand this properly. Had she had enough food, had it been otherwise, she might have been able to leave that farm, have your brother, and stay in Poland and never go back?

Right. But there was no food.

There was no food.

No food. Nothing.

And there were no German authorities, then, in the town who knew that here is a laborer who should be-- there wasn't anybody controlling her.

No, not yet. But eventually, they would catch up. And being in that house, I remember in the middle of the night, like, 11:00 o'clock, there's a knock on the door. And my mother opens the door. And it's a couple with a child.

And they said to my mother, they're on the way to Russia. Could they sleep overnight, even on the floor? And my mother realized that they were in trouble. So she pointed to the closet. She says, well, you sleep over there.

And next morning when I got up, they were already gone. And I said to mother, I said, what happened?

Oh, they left about 5:00 this morning. They were Jews, running away from Hitler.

Oh. And she says, I hope nobody saw us housing them over night. Because that would be the end of us.

So when they left in the morning, when I got up to look around, I see a German soldier on the snowbank with his machine gun, just looking around.

And this is in the rented house?

In the rented house, and I was petrified when I saw his head sticking out from underneath the bank, snowbank. So I said to mother I said let's go back to that farm. At least we get soup and a piece of bread once a day. Here, there is nothing.

It is, I mean, a very unusual irony.

It is!

To think that you would get better fed in a labor camp than at home.

Than at home, exactly. Well, can you imagine? We just came back from Germany. There's no fields that were cultivated, even my mother's acre and a half that she had was just overgrown with weeds.

So when you left that time, the second time, from Gnojnica, did you ever go back there again?

No. I mean, to Gnojnica from Germany, no.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

After the war, we went straight to America.

OK. So as far as that is concerned, you left your aunts and uncles and your grandmother and whatever life you had there. You didn't know it at the time, but you left it.

Right. That was the last time I saw it after we left.

And your grandmother, did you ever see her again?

Well, when we came to the States, my mother brought her whole family over from Poland, one by one.

OK. We can talk about that later. The other question I've got is about Mr. Brodacki, Jozef Brodacki. He was part of your life and your mother's life during the war.

Yes.

Did they stay together afterwards?

No.

What happened?

He got sick. He was a chain smoker. He would smoke the dust from the--

Sawdust?

--sawdust. And he had a hard time breathing after the war. And he was in the hospital, in a German hospital. And my mother and I and his son went to the hospital.

And I could hear my mother telling him, you have a wife who was taken to Siberia with your two girls. Maybe by now they're back home. You have to go back to your wife.



I'm going to America. And I came to say goodbye. So we don't know whether he died at that hospital or whether he went back to Poland. But a lot of people didn't go back to Poland, especially those that were born in America.

So do you think she loved him? And he loved her?

I don't think so. It was just a friendship.

It was comfort in a hard place?

Mhm. Because you never knew whether you're going to be alive the next day or dead. It was just the moment of your life that you enjoyed or whatever.

Did your mother explain to you the facts of life when he came on the scene? I mean, when your brother was born?

No, she never did.

And what kind of a connection did he did he have with his son who was your half-brother?

Well, he loved him. He loved him dearly. He always carried him on his shoulders on his days off. And my brother doesn't remember him, because he was born in '42, and this was '45. So he doesn't remember things.

In fact, the other day I spoke to my brother Leon. And I was mentioning something from the war. And he says, how do you remember all this? I said, I don't know. But I just remember.

So that also tells me, if your brother was born in 1942 you had been on the larger farm for about two years.

Yes.

And then you you go back to Poland. You stay there for a while. And then you go back.

Yes. And when you went back, did you stay for a much longer time on the larger farm? Or did you move fairly soon thereafter to the smaller one?

I think we moved towards the end of '43 to the smaller farm. Because I remember it wasn't long that we were there when-- in '44, I was 10, and I was told that I have to work along with the elderly, with the workers, because they can't afford to feed me otherwise.

That was their excuse. Where did you experience, let's, say quote, unquote, "better treatment," on the larger farm or on the smaller farm?

I would say it was the same, same treatment. We couldn't go to church on the small farm. We weren't there too long before we were shipped to that sawmill factory where my mother was working making rifle butts.

OK. One other thing that wasn't quite clear to me, where was the small farm located?

It was not far from Dobritz. But I don't know the name because I got so sick over there that my memory has faded.

Got it. Got it.

So I was recuperating more than I was on that farm.

And so let's talk now, you wanted to tell me about the factory where your mother gets shipped to work to make these rifle butts. Tell me what you found.

Well. We had one room above the factory. And there were other workers, Polish workers there that were housed in the same factory building. But the owners were, like, in the house next to it.

And I didn't have to work there. Because there were too many machineries, too much for children to get in trouble. So I only took care of my brother. And of course, recuperating from my sickness.

And at that factory, of April 1945, where we were liberated by the American soldiers.

How did this happen? Tell me.

We heard a lot of bombings, because the factory was close to train station. Because when they loaded those butts on the cards, they pushed it to the train station. And the train station took everything that they produced and distributed them wherever they needed. So at that time, the American soldiers were bombing factories and train stations. So we heard so much bombing, day and night, that week that they were approaching us.

Were there any German soldiers or guards left at the factory?

Well, the night before the American soldiers finally pulled in, the German soldiers were sleeping in the factory, wall-to-wall German soldiers. And we were on our best behavior, because you didn't know when it was your turn to be shot.

Did you see people-- I'm sorry. Did you see people being shot?

No.

Did you ever see a corpse, by the way?

Oh, yes. After the war, yes.

After the war?

Mhm.

OK.

And so we were on our best behavior. Because we didn't want to get shot.

Yeah.

And so the next morning, they all left. The Germans soldiers left. But the American soldiers were pulling in.

So we were hiding underneath the factory, which was an unfinished basement. It was just a hole. It was lot of dirt around us and rats and mice roaming around. So we slept there overnight because we were afraid to sleep on the third floor.

And of course, without any food, because it was upstairs. We were downstairs. And all of a sudden, Jozef peeks out into an opening in the wall.

[KNOCKING]

[DOORBELL RINGS]

[ALARM BUZZING]

Let's cut.

[INAUDIBLE] at the front door.

OK. Are you ready? He's not ready.

I'm just hearing a lot of--

You hearing--

Here, we'll just do it this way.

You're hearing my [INAUDIBLE], that's what you're hearing.

Let's do it that way in the middle. That gives you a little bit of latitude.

OK.

All right. I'm about ready. Thank you for waiting.

Did you know that the Lithuanians and the Poles have something in common?

Oh, yeah. We a lot in common.

Our queen married your king.

It's true.

I forget which century.

Oh, way back, 500 years ago. And people still talk about it today.

Right.

They really do. OK.

We're rolling, yeah.

All right. So before the break, we were talking about the moment that the Americans liberated you. Do you remember where this factory was located where they made these rifle butts?

I know it's not far from Saalfeld-Saale. Saalfeld on the Saale, Saale is a river, within walking distance. But I don't remember the town. Because I was still recuperating from my sickness.

OK.

So that's why I don't remember the little farm and the factory.

OK.

But you were down in the cellar?

In the cellar. And when Jozef peeked out through a opening, he says, shh, quiet. There's an American soldier coming with a machine gun. So we, like, froze, because we didn't know whether we're going to get shot over there or whether

we're going to get liberated.

So he enters. He scooches down, because it was just a hole to get in. And he looks up at us. Our hands went up automatically, because we wanted him to know that we're not dangerous people.

So somebody yells out, [NON-ENGLISH], telling them that we're not Germans. [NON-ENGLISH] means Polish. [NON-ENGLISH] means Russian.

So he put his gun down. And he asks if there were any German soldiers.

In what language, in English?

I don't remember that, either. But I know that my mother told him, yes, there were some here, wall-to-wall, in the factory they slept. Where are they now?

They went that a-way. They pointed to the train station. So he relaxed a little. And he says, come on out. Meet the other guys.

So when we go out, we could hardly open our eyes, because the sun was hurting our eyes. And we look up. And there's a whole line of tanks and American soldiers peeking out of those tanks.

And we're, like, scared sheep, you know? We come out slowly. We're moving towards the street.

And the American soldiers from the tanks are throwing candy at us kids. There was me, my brother, and about three other children. So we start picking the candy.

And I see the grown ups-- there's more soldiers coming out from the tanks onto the street. And I see the grown ups going on their knees and kissing the soldiers' boots for liberating us. So he told us what they can do for us, what they can't do.

He said, we are still fighting the war. So you have to walk to the nearest DP camp. And the Germans can't force you to work. They have to feed you if you're hungry. If somebody refuses, just get a hold of an American soldier, and he'll fix it up for you.

Did your mother tell these soldiers that she was an American citizen?

Yes. Oh, yes. So we talked-- they talked with the adults. The kids only observed what was going on.

And after the soldier told us what we can do and can't do, you have 24 hours of liberation. You can do what you want. Some people were going back to the Germans that were mistreating them, beating them up or killing them.

You saw that that or you heard that?

Yes. I saw. We went through bodies that were lying on the ground. And some people were not as violent.

So we packed our bags. And next morning, we started going towards Saalfeld-Saale, where they told us that there was a gathering of Polish and all sorts of nationalities in that school. So we go to Saalfeld on the Saale, walking all day long, mind you, because the trains weren't running. The bridges were down.

So we get there in the evening and a lot of bottles scattered all over the place, a lot of drunken people, hardly can't stand up. They were celebrating. They were given time of freedom. So they were robbing the wine cellars, everything that came in handy.

So out of curiosity, I was picking up those bottles which had a sip or two in them and I was drinking that, not knowing

what can happen. So I got drunk at 11 years old. I was drunk. And I was talking gibberish and all sorts of funny things that my mother had to put me to bed.

And so we stayed there, I don't know how many weeks, when we were shipped to another camp. Because it was a better camp where it was more organized.

When you talk shipped, does that mean you were driven by truck or something? Sometimes truck, sometimes walking.

Mhm.

American trucks would pick us up and load a truck full of people and bring them there. So we went through, like, eight camps while we were-- after the war. Because my mother had married now, a single guy.

So tell me at what point had you said goodbye to Mr. Brodacki?

Brodacki, when he was in the hospital. We never saw him again.

Yes. But where was that hospital? At what sequence of camps was this? How did the camps and the hospital--

That was in the camp of-- I think it was Lautenburg. I forget now. It will come to me, maybe, later.

But was it soon after liberation?

Yes.

He went to the hospital because he couldn't breathe.

But he was with you until then?

Right. In '45, when the American soldiers liberated us. And it was, like, in April, in the spring. And by the fall, we went already to three or four camps by then.

And when your mother told these soldiers that she was an American citizen, did that make a difference as to what kind of camp she could go to, what kind of rations she got, what kind of treatment she had?

No, the treatment was the same. It's just that they were telling us that, oh, go to that camp. Because that camp has American citizens over there. And they're all going to America.

So we kept going and going and going until we found a camp. It was Butzbach.

Butzbach?

Butzbach. It was just the camp for Americans that were going to America.

And another question from your--

Lechow is that one I couldn't think. [? Luchau, ?] they call it. Lechow.

Lechow.

Lechow.

OK. That's where the hospital was?

That's where the hospital was, yes.

OK. When you were born, did you get Polish citizenship? Did you have Polish citizenship?

I didn't have any papers. All I had was a baptismal certificate.

And did you have that with you?

Yes. I still have it.

OK. And so you didn't have any citizenship at all.

No.

Were you eligible for American citizenship because your mother was American?

Well. We didn't find out-- I was, but we didn't know that we were treated as Americans until I came to the States and found out.

OK.

Because they sent me a form to fill out. Because every January, I was reporting as an alien in the American-- New York City in America. And they sent me a paper to report to the immigration office. So I assumed I was in trouble with my papers.

But the gentleman opened his portfolio, and he says, why are you bothering us every January with this form here? You're an American. You shouldn't be filling out this form.

I said, I am? I almost fell off the chair. And I said to him, well, I'll be graduating soon and voting. I said, I have no papers to prove that I'm an American citizen.

Send us a small picture of you. I don't know, 2-by-2 or something like that, and we'll send you a certificate. So a few weeks later, I get a certificate in mail stating, Cecylia Ziobro is American citizen as of June 1, 1934, since I was born. And all this time, my mother didn't know and I didn't know.

And you got the citizenship when you were how old? I mean, when you got the certificate, when you were how old?

I was maybe 18? I was in high school.

So you didn't know you were an American until then?

No. My mother probably didn't understand when they were telling her.

Right. Of course.

But everybody, every soldier that approached us, she probably told him I was born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. So in any case, we were in Saalfeld-Saale. We stayed there a few months when they shipped us to another camp.

And I can name you the camps, but I don't know how long we stayed there.

It's OK.

So from Saalfeld-Saale, it was Lechow. Niederrad near Frankfurt.

Am Mine?

Am Mine, yes.

So that's already in the Western part of Germany?

Yes. Then it was Wildflecken. Then it was-- in Wildflecken, I went to a Polish school. And we learned Polish and English there.

And that was when you were already 11 years old?

That was when I was-- that was 1946,

12-years-old.

--'47, between like that. And then from Wildflecken, we went to Butzbach. Then from Butzbach to Bremen. And then Bremerhaven and then to America.

I skipped one. I forget which one I skipped.

OK. And at what place did your mother meet the person who would be her second husband?

Yes, my mother met him while we were in the camp in-- my mind is leaving me. But it was the second camp or third camp. It will come to me eventually.

It's OK.

And she went looking for her sister and brother who were also in another part of the country in Germany, because they were taken to labor camps. And after the war, they decided to go back to their mother, to Poland. So when my mother went to those camps where they were, they were already gone. Because she wanted them to realize that they can come to America because they were American citizens.

So she came back with him. Leon is his name.

What was his last name?

It's a long Polish name, Niemoczynski.

Niemoczynski?

Yes. He was a Polish officer who fought the war. And then the Russians came to Poland and took him to Siberia. He escaped from Siberia through India and to Tehran, someplace around there, and finally wound up in Germany in the Polish camps. So my mother met him there.

Did he fight the Germans?

Yes, he fought when he was in the Polish army. But the Polish army fought only for a few weeks. And they couldn't any more. They didn't have the supplies.

Well, a lot of people were deported to the Soviet Union from Eastern Poland.

Yes. To Siberia.

To Siberia. And then, General Sikorski, in 1941, made an agreement with Stalin when Germany attacked the Soviet

Union that military aged men would be released from the camps. And some of them made their way through Tehran to Palestine. And then fought with the British under the British aegis in Italy.

Yes.

In Monte Cassino.

He fought with the British, yes.

OK. So that's where he was able to--

Mhm.

--so that's part of his story.

Yes.

OK. And his name was Niemoczynski?

Niemoczynski.

Niemoczynski.

So he became my stepfather.

OK.

And I have three sisters, Grace, Elizabeth, and Barbara, and Wesley from that family. And they're wonderful. We're so close. I'm the oldest, so I really raised them when they were born. And we have such a wonderful relationship.

And so when we came to Butzbach, which was almost way to America, 1948 of April, I forget the date-- exact date I forgot. It was in April. And we came on the boat, Marine Jumper.

Marine Jumper?

Yes. What did it look like, this boat?

It had two chimneys. I made sure of that. Because my grandmother used to say, when she came on boats, the more chimneys a ship had, the safer it was.

Really?

She came here three times, here and back to Poland. So she had the experience. So three is even better. But this one has two chimneys. So I thought to myself, well, we're safe.

OK.

It took us close to 10 days before we came across. But then we couldn't get off, because there were too many ships ahead of us. So we had to wait another night in that Marine Jumper before we could get off.

And what harbor did you go to?

In New York.



So you passed the Statue of Liberty?

Oh, yes. Yes. And a lot of people were explaining to me about the statue, because I didn't know anything about it. There were some Americans on the ship that spoke English and knew the history.

So when we got off, they put us at Hotel Chelsea on 23rd Street in Manhattan, because my stepfather had to be left behind because his papers were not in order. And somebody told my mother at the last camp that if we go along without him, they're going to ship him faster. Otherwise, we're going to stay--

Mhm?

--another year or two over there.

[CLEARS THROAT]

Excuse me. So she was there with three kids and one on the way. And her brother in Niagara Falls wanted her to come in the worst way. But she didn't know where my stepfather was going to wind up. So she was just wanting to find out what to do.

When somebody from the immigration committee says, well, we can't keep you in this hotel anymore. It's too expensive. You have any family to go to? And my mother says, yes, I have a brother and an aunt, Aunt Agatha, my grandmother's sister, living in Niagara Falls.

Well, you better go there. So we went on the train and went there the next day. Went to Niagara Falls and met the relatives.

Did you speak English by then?

A little, not much. Because I was learning at the camps, English. Knowing German, was very easy for me to learn English. And so they bring us to an apartment where my Uncle Walter and his Aunt Agatha paid for.

And we stayed there a month, I think, before my stepfather-- he was at Ellis Island. And he sent us a telegram that I just got a janitorial job on 11th Street and Avenue B. And he says, I'm not coming to Niagara Falls. So you better come to New York City. Because there's more job opportunities here.

So we went back. I had already started school in Niagara Falls. And then we come to New York City. And I was glad. Because it was an exciting city.

I went to a public school. And my brother went to a Catholic school, because he needed to learn more about religion. My mother felt I knew enough about the religion. I knew how to pray, so it was enough.

Where in New York did you live? Where did you end up living?

We lived in New York on 11th Street and Avenue B.

Oh, I see. In the same building where he had a job?

Yes. And there was a lady, Helen Ramirez, that helped all the refugees to get settled. And she is the one that recommended the janitorial job in her house. Because she says that her landlord was looking for one. And she was visiting the Ellis Island to help people like that who needed help.

So I became very friendly with her, because she didn't have any children. And she was very helpful. She taught me how to sew and cook the American way. And she was Polish, too.

So I went to school. And I loved it. We learned, at that school, a public school, I forget what PS that was. It was on 12th Street and Avenue A, or First Avenue, between Avenue A and First Avenue.

But what a different world from the one you had left!

Oh, my God. What a difference. But it was all new. And it was nerve wracking, because you never knew what was going to be next.

So in the meantime, my stepfather decided that that janitorial job wasn't big enough. There was one better one in the Bronx. So on Teller Avenue, he had a 48-family home with a free apartment plus \$100 a month pay. So we moved over there.

And of course, the janitorial duties became my duties. To wash the first floor once a week, to wash the whole five stories once a month. Make sure that that the place is kept clean.

So what did he do? My stepfather was a carpenter. So he had a carpenter's job. My mother, after she had her last child, she went back to cleaning offices at night. Because at the daytime, I was home with the other children, so she couldn't go and work because the children were not old enough.

So we stayed there for a while. When my stepfather and my mother had difficulties getting along. And so they split up.

And we went to a smaller-- my mother and the children and I went to a smaller janitorial job, which was, like, 16 families. And of course, I took care of that and went to school.

That sounds like a hard life.

It was. And there was no friends to be had. There was no time to have friends.

So after a while, my stepfather started coming to visit us at that other job on Fox Street in the Bronx. And then they got to get friendlier and friendlier. And they decided to buy a house on St. Anne's Avenue and 156th Street that was an eight family house.

So I still went to the same school, St. Adalbert's. It was a Catholic school. And my brother went there. My sisters went there.

And although it was a long ways to walk from Fox Street to Melrose Avenue, like, half an hour to 45 minutes to walk to that school because there was no buses. But when we moved to St. Anne's Avenue, it was closer. It was, like, a 10 minute walk.

And then the high school that I went to was across the street from our house. And I wanted to learn sewing. So when I went to register, I told the clerk, she says what do you want to study? I said sewing.

She says, you want to learn sewing? Sitting at the piece work, 40 hours a week, sewing? I said, what do you suggest?

She says, well, you could go to a secretarial school, which is across the street from you. And she says, you can learn office machines, bookkeeping, steno.

Oh, really? I can. But I said, I can't speak English that well. My English is still not perfect.

She says you can learn that. I listened to her. And I'm so grateful. I don't know her name. And I pray for her in my prayers, thanking her for my profession.

Because that's what I did when I graduated. I was a receptionist bookkeeper. And then I became the head bookkeeper, because the lady that was there retired. And I loved my job ever since.

Were you in New York City?

That was in New York City.

And what was the company?

The company was Nowy Swiat Publishing, which is new world.

Is this where also the Polish newspaper was?

Polish newspaper, which was located on 11th Street, between 11th and 12th Street and Broadway.

Isn't it that the Polish Veterans Association is close by? I think Irving Place or something like that? Not so far from--

[INAUDIBLE] this Polish home on St. Mark's Place, there was a Polish home where all the dances were. And church was there close by, school. So in any case, I loved my job.

And I worked there for close to 10 years, but when we got married in 61, my husband wanted me home. And the newspaper required that I work till 8:00 or 9:00. And it wasn't over time, either. It was just--

The regular pay. Yeah.

So he got fed up with that. He says you don't have to take that. So the old manager of the paper died. Mr. Stiebel, Stiebel, he was very patriotic.

Because I wanted to leave many times because I wasn't making enough money. And he always brought the patriotism into the picture. What kind of Polish patriot are you? Are you going to leave us?

So I said, OK. I'll hang around. But then when my marriage duty called on me, I had to leave.

How did you meet your husband? And when did you get married?

In '61.

And how did you meet?

Well, I worked for the Polish newspapers. So I got three tickets to go to the movies. Any new movie that came out, even in Radio City, I was able to go see it for free.

I was able to go Polish balls, any functions for free, because I was working for a newspaper, so I got free passes. So they're giving me the free passes. And the head bookkeeper was sending them to-- so I said, well, I can't go. I have no one to go with.

Well, you go. You go. You never know who you'll meet.

I have no one to escort me. In those days, you had gloves up to here. You had a ball gown. You couldn't just walk into a hall, dancing hall and go dancing, right? You had to have an escort.

I said, I don't have any escort. Take the tickets. Maybe you'll find somebody.

I took the tickets. And I knew a couple. They were in their 40s. I was in my 20s.

Stanley and Eva, Eva was German and Stanley was a Polish officer and he married Eva after the war. Because she was a

widow. Her husband died in the war in Moscow.

So I said to them, I have two tickets here. Would you like to go to a Polish ball? We can always buy a third ticket. They jumped for it with joy.

Oh, yes. Of course. And Eva says Stanley, we just came back from England over here.

And you don't know any Polish people you like to meet. Oh, of course, we'll go. We'll go. We'll go.

So a week before the ball, Eva gets a telegram from Germany that her mother is in the hospital dying. So she says to me, you know, I have to go to Germany. But you go with my husband. Because he wants to meet Polish people. And I won't have any objections if you go.

So we went. And before we entered, I said to Stanley, Stanley, once we go through the gate, through the door, you're on your own and I'm on my own. I'll dance with anybody that comes and asks me. And you can dance with anybody you want. Of course, he agreed happily.

So that's what we did. And after a while, we hear a singer on the stage. So he sang, I forget what he sang. But he sang a lot of Italian songs.

And we applauded and kept dancing. I kept dancing with older men, because this was a Polish doctors and lawyers ball. So naturally, there was hardly any young people to dance with me. So when he was singing on the stage, he felt sorry for me that I was dancing with my sugar daddy.

[LAUGHTER]

So I didn't know that until after. And I always felt sorry for him because he was dancing with older women. I said one of those must be his-- he must be a gigolo.

[LAUGHTER]

And we think of each other different thoughts, you know? But we haven't met yet. So Stanley, my escort, goes behind stage. And he says to Bob, would you like to join us for a drink at our table. So Bob knew I was with him, so he said sure.

And we stayed there way past-- the ball was ended, like, past 2 o'clock. Because the orchestra was gone and we are still sitting at our table until they threw us out. And I have the program I can show you. Because I don't remember the hotel. I remembered it when I was younger.

And so he comes. And Stanley's introducing him to everybody at the table, there were like eight people at the end of the table. So there was quite a bit of Polish people, quite a bunch of Polish people.

And so he makes sure, when Stanley was introducing him, that he sat right next to me. But Stanley sat next to me, so Stanley had to go over there. So we start talking. And he's in show business.

And I'm saying to myself, show business is not my desire or whatever. He must be flirting all over the place. So Stanley gets up and he says, let's go to my house, to my apartment on 83rd and West End Avenue.

And so we went-- excuse me for a minute--

It's OK.

--to Stanley's apartment. He makes these drinks, and we talk. And it so happens that the lady that he danced with at the ball was there, too. So I'm saying to myself, there must be something going on between the two of them since she's here,

right?

But he comes. And we're singing up a storm of Polish songs. And people are banging on the ceiling for us to keep quiet.

Come 6 o'clock, he's the first one to leave. And everybody say, why are you leaving? It's early. It's early. And I came to the door to say goodbye.

And he says, well, there's a 6:30 mass on 96th Street. And I want to catch it, because I'm going to be very busy the rest of the day.

So I said to myself, uh oh, can't be such a bad show business guy. He's going to church. So he asked me for my telephone number.

And I said, well, I'm listed in the telephone book if you'd like to look it up. And I gave him my name, my last name. Lo and behold, the next day he calls. And we went to see a movie. I think it was Ben Hur.

And then we went he took me skating to Central Park. Because whenever he was in New York City, not on the road, he would go skating. I said, I don't know how to skate. And I don't have any skates.

He said, well, you can rent them. And I'll teach you how to skate. Well, it wasn't that easy, like it sounds.

So we started seeing each other ever since. And after he came back from his tour, wherever he was sent, he was in Greenland and Iceland singing for the troops, in Canada. Then we would get together again. Or he would call, wherever he was.

And Nowy Swiat where I worked, they would all gather around me to listen what he had to say. And it was on those phones where you couldn't talk normal. You had to say a few words and say over.

And he would start talking. And he would say over. And then I'd start talking.

[LAUGHTER]

And when they came back from the tour, he was gone for quite some time. I think he was in Greenland. He called and said he had something very important to tell me. So he says, could you see me for breakfast before you go to work on Broadway? I think it was at Horn & Hardart, one of those where you have lunch there, had breakfast there. So we met there.

And he goes on his knees and what else, would you marry me? And I'm going.

[LAUGHTER]

He's in show business. What am I to do? What can I say? But--

You said yes.

I said yes.

Yeah.

And he was gone and came back and gone. And in '61, of April 8, we were married. 53 years, going on 54 years.

Well, congratulations. And he had to quit show business soon after that because he was very sick with bleeding ulcers. And they didn't have any medicine for that at that time. It was just Maalox, Maalox.

So I sent him to a Polish doctor who helped him real well. And he said that if he doesn't quit show business, he could be dead in three months. He had high blood pressure, ulcers, bleeding ulcers, mind you, and anemic. These three things.

They used to give him injections of vitamins to boost up the anemia, get rid of the anemia. And he was singing on and off in small clubs and stuff. But it was really painful to have that ulcers and to sing.

Did you have children?

Yes. We have had Elizabeth in '64. And in '66, we had Robert, Bobby, two years apart. We had children three years, because I was still working.

By then, when I left the Polish newspaper, I applied for a job at Metro Goldwyn Mayer in the cashier's office. And I was doing the deposits of all the checks that came in and bringing them to Chase Manhattan Bank.

And then we were working on payroll for the entire company, processing payroll. So you had to proofread it and submit it to our computer room, which they had those old-fashioned computers there.

So this is such a different world and such a different life from how it started out.

It is. It's like being in heaven. And then, after I had my daughter, of course, I had to stop working. And I told them at Metro Goldwyn Mayer that I'll be staying with the child. I don't want to come back. So they gave me a big party.

And two years later, we had our son, Robert. And when Robert was a year and a half we moved back to Manchester, New Hampshire.

Where Robert, where your husband was from?

Where he was born, yes.

OK.

And there, after a while, when the children were big enough, I went to work for the City of Manchester in the bookkeeping department. And I loved every bit of it. Every job I was at, I just loved it.

What a wonderful thing.

Mhm?

What a wonderful thing.

Yes.

You know? It's quite a blessing to be able to enjoy one's work.

Yes.

And then I had to retire after putting in 20 years for the city, because he was very sick. He had so many health problems, heart attacks at first. It started with heart attacks.

Did you ever talk to your children or to your husband about what you had been through in Poland during these years?

Not in detail like I'm talking to you. I would tell them, yes, we were in labor camps for so long and so long. We weren't treated well. We were hungry most of the time.

But I didn't go into every single detail. Because when the children were in school, I didn't think they would understand. And I didn't want to make them sad.

And by then, I had some German friends that I made, friends in New York City. I didn't want to dwell on it because they turned out to be such wonderful friends. That I think forgiveness is very, very important when you go through a thing like this.

Do you feel like you have forgiven?

Yes. Definitely. I wouldn't want to go through it again. But I had forgiven a long time ago.

And was it the specific people, or was it more general than that?

General, general, because I was deprived of education. I started going to school late in my life. I could have learned much more. And when I was home, I wasn't forced to read, to study, to do this, to do that. I was more on my own, you know?

And there was so much work to do at home. And you have such a big family that you have no time to read.

Yeah. Yeah.

And study.

So when you're talking about the big family, you're talking about after the war?

The big family after the war, yes. So I wasn't conditioned to go to school to study more, only what I had to do I did.

When did he start talking more in detail about what you went through? When did you write your book?

Well, when the former president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, came out and said that the Holocaust is a myth. Well, that drove me crazy. I said to myself, what does he know?

I was there. I saw the people suffering. And I went through it myself, not as much as the others suffered that were in concentration camps. I know they suffered much more.

But then when people, Americans started repeating the same thing somewhere in the Midwest, that this is all a myth? Well, my hair stood up. And I said, I have to write it down.

And I went to the typewriter right there and I started writing and writing and rewriting. And finally, I gave the whole thing to a son and he edited it and published it.

I'm very glad he did. I'm very glad you did.

Yes, I am, too. Although this is hard work, it's worth it. Because I know the new generation will not think it's a myth.

Is there anything you'd like to add to what we've spoken about today?

I think we covered everything.

Any final words?

Final words, well, I thank you for your time and the gentleman here.

Thank you. And we thank you.

And I'm glad you're going to spread it.

Thank you.

And when I'm gone, when I'm gone, everybody's going to hear about it because of the book, *Trapped In The Nightmare*. It was a nightmare when I was six years old to go through all this.

Of course. So thank you very much, Mrs. Thibault. And that concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Cecylia Ziobro Thibault.

You pronounce that very well.

Thank you. On July 17, 2014. Thank you very much.

Thank you. Thank you. A million thank you.

You're welcome.

Go ahead.

OK. So here you're showing me a photograph. Can you tell me a little bit about this photograph, when it was taken and where?

That was on the smaller farm. I'm wearing an apron and standing next to Tante Lotte. And she's standing next to her son, who just came home on leave with one arm missing. He was in the military.

I see. And who is the lady on the far left?

The far left is her niece. And the person that took that picture is her younger son. Now I don't remember their names except Tante Lotte, because she made sure I called her Tante Lotte all the time.

OK.

And you were about 10-years-old.

10-years-old when I was forced to work on that farm, taking care of the cows and the cleaning of the stables, feeding the animals.

I see. OK. Thank you. And now we'll do the front of the book. Can you tell me what this is?

That's my life story, *Trapped In A Nightmare* is this story about my family and I going through the World War II in the Nazi labor camp in Germany.

And when did you start writing it?

About five years ago.

So if it's 2014 now, you started in 2009?

Yes. And son edited it and published it. Because of what the Iranian president said, that it's a myth, that the Holocaust is a myth.

And you wanted to refute that?



Right. I wanted to remind the young generation that it was not a myth. That it was actually very, very true.

OK. Thank you.

Thank you.

OK.

OK.