

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Irene Sobczak January 28, 2015 RG-50.030*0790

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PREFACE

The following interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

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IRENE SOBCZAK
January 28, 2015

Question: This is a **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with Mrs. **Irena Synowiec Sobczak** on January 28th, 2015, in **Chicago, Illinois**. Thank you so much, Mrs. **Sobczak** for agreeing to speak with us, for patiently waiting all day long, because today we also spoke with your sister, and her name is Mrs. **Stanisława Synowiec Tobis**. And now we will speak with you, and – and hear your memories, and what stays with you about the experiences that your family had. So I will start in the same way as I did with your sister, and I will ask, can you tell me what was your name when you were born?

Answer: **Irene – Irena Synowiec**.

Q: Did you have a middle name?

A: No.

Q: No middle name.

A: Not at that time.

Q: Okay. And what was the date of your birth?

A: February 16, 1930.

Q: 1930. And where were you born?

A: **Brantowce – osada Brantowce, powiat Wolkowysk, wojewód – wait – gmina Łyskow, powiat Wolkowysk, województwa Białostocka.**

Q: Okay. So you were in the **Białystok** region –

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Yes.

Q: In the settlement of **Bransowts(ph)**?

A: **Brantowce**.

Q: **Brantowce**. And tell me the names of your mother and father.

A: My mother is **Zofia(ph) Bokwajits(ph) Synowiec**. And my father,
Wawjeenitz(ph) Synowiec.

Q: **Wawjeenitz(ph) Synowiec**.

A: Yes.

Q: And your brothers and sisters?

A: Sti – brat – brother **Stanislaw Synowiec**, and my sister, **Stanislawa Synowiec Tobis**.

Q: And you had another brother?

A: Yeah, jor – little **George**.

Q: Little **George**.

A: Baby **George**.

Q: What would his name be in Polish?

A: **Urich**.

Q: **Urich, Urich**. And when was he born, what year?

A: 1939.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Okay. Do you remember the exact date?

A: No, not the date.

Q: Not the date, okay. Tell me, what are some of your earliest memories from home?

A: Oh, I tell you, it was like a paradise on earth.

Q: Really?

A: Well, we had everything there; a place for us to play, we had the river to spend the summer – summer days there, and woods to run around, fields, garden, and you name it, you know, we had.

Q: And this is – this was your father's land?

A: Yes.

Q: And tell me how he came to have this land.

A: Because he was fighting in nineteen – in first World War, in 1920.

Q: Okay.

A: And afterwards, I think he received it, part of the land.

Q: Okay. And tell – from your sister we learned a lot about what the place looked like. Can you describe your home to me, the house that you lived in?

A: You mean the rooms, and all that stuff?

Q: Mm-hm. How many rooms did it have?

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: I think five.

Q: Five rooms.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Kitchen, dining room, bedroom and then another bedroom, yeah. Something like that, you know.

Q: Okay. And something that I didn't ask your sister, but I will ask you, tell me about your parents' personalities. What kind of – was your father a very friendly person, or a more reserved person? What were some of the values that he had? And I guess the same question about your mother.

A: Okay, let's – Mother.

Q: Okay.

A: The only thing that she was – I call her my gold, my silver, my pearl. I always call her like that.

Q: Really?

A: She – and then I would jump on her leg, hug her and will say that, and I love her so much, she was very, very good to me.

Q: Yeah.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Now Dad, I think when I was five years old, then he moved in here – to there, to live with us before we work in **Wolkowysk**, and my sister says that I – when he wanted to ke – to hug me, I would run away.

Q: Really?

A: So – so I was always running away from him, until when he stay for good, then I got to know him, and he was very, very good father. He let us do more things than my mom would –

Q: So she was stricter?

A: – you know, more dangerous. Oh yeah, because she worried that we will get hurt, and he would say, that's okay, let them do it.

Q: That's all – that sounds so much like a mother and a father. A mother thinks of protection, a father thinks the child has to stretch and grow.

A: Yeah. One time we were playing hi – hide and seek, and he put me high on the shelf behind the door in the kitchen, and told me don't move, sit there. So I was sitting there and the – and di – the other children were looking in the house, outside, can't – running forth and back to f – and they couldn't find me, and I – I was sitting petrified. So anyway –

Q: So did he finally come get you, or did you climb down?

A: Oh yeah. No, no, he – he had to take me down because they couldn't find me.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Yeah. So tell me, why did you call Mama – your mama, your gold, your silver, your pearl?

A: I don't know. Because I loved her, probably.

Q: Yeah.

A: She was everything to me, you know.

Q: Yeah. Was she a warm person?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Yeah?

A: They both were really good parents, you know. And I remember the last Christmas, that's 19 – no, 19 –

Q: Thirty-nine.

A: – '39. No, thir – '38, because '39 we already didn't had cr – we didn't celebrate Christmas, because already Russians with us. And like in **Poland**, you had **Wigilia**, that main dinner –

Q: Christmas eve, yeah.

A: Yeah. So in the morning you would go to the woods with ma – went on that year to the woods with my brother, cut the tr – Christmas tree, and brou – they brought to the living room, and both of them were dressing up, and kept me in the kitchen, I couldn't see that. So I peeked through the kitchen, the door hole to see something,

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

many times I was hit with the door on my nose. But then after that big dinner, doors open up, and there was a Christmas tree full of – we used to use candles – lighted candles and beautiful decorated, so we came in and then sang the songs, and then opened the gifts, and then my dad would – took me on the lap and started telling story about **Jesus**, Blessed Mother and Saint **Joseph**. And I know it – next morning, I end up in bed. So apparently I fall asleep. That's the best, best time I remember.

L-Last time.

Q: So it was the best memory, yeah.

A: Memory from last time I had Dad, because later on Dad was – J-J-January 1940, when they took us ca – took him –

Q: Yeah.

A: – away, you know.

Q: We'll talk about that. So, you have this memory of the – you didn't know it was the last Christmas, but it went th – it was your last Christmas.

A: Yeah. But that's – that's the way we – every year they celebrate. The children, young children couldn't see Christmas tree until after **Wigilia**.

Q: So first you had Christmas eve dinner.

A: Yes.

Q: And then they would go decorate the tree.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: They – in the morning they did already. My bro – my dad and my brother did in the mor – whole day, you know. Cut the tree, decorate it, and then dress up and this –

Q: You were, until your baby brother **George** was born, you were the youngest.

A: Yeah, that's what my sister was getting. I would squeal on her always.

Q: Oh, and did you get away with it?

A: Yeah, and she was – she got it, I think, from my mother. I've – that – I feel guilty now.

Q: Do you have your – have you apologized in the meantime?

A: Oh, I – yeah. She's a – you know, she's a good sister.

Q: So, did you go to school?

A: Yes. I finish two – two years, and I started third year.

Q: Okay.

A: In Polish language and then we had to go to a different school, that we got Russian teacher in.

Q: Okay, I'm no – do you have any memory of your mother's aunt, who was your **babcia**?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: I just remember when we went – my dad took us there and left two of us to stay overnight, and how good she was there, when she was putting I to sleep, and all that stuff.

Q: Did she live in the city?

A: **Wolkowysk.**

Q: **Wolkowysk.**

A: In **Wo-Wolkowysk.**

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: And –

A: That's all what I remember.

Q: Okay, okay.

A: Oh, and then when she came to the train, follow us to the train, that I remember, too, very well.

Q: We'll – we'll come to that point.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay. So, I'm not going to spend as much time asking about pre-war life with you as I did with your sister, because you were younger –

A: Right.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: – and – and we were quite thorough, you know, there. Is there – and you were hearing this – is there anything that you'd like to add to what your sister had said about what life was like before the war started; about what your settlement was like, the people that you knew, the people that you went to school with, something like that?

A: No, not much, because I kind of was friends with my next door neighbor girl in my age, and those other children just were t – they live in the village, we lived separate, so we didn't had much to do at all, you know.

Q: Yeah, you didn't have much contact.

A: No, no –

Q: Okay.

A: – so that – that's about it, you know.

Q: Okay. So, do you remember when the war started?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Tel me how – how it was.

A: Oh, I – I know that before Russians came, people – you see, parents, when they talk among themselves, the children had to stay away, you know, and it – we had to go and play. But they kept us apart, you know. But I could overhear lot of things, and they were talking that looks like – about **Germany**, because – and i – at that

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

time, the – we heard airplanes flying close to us, and things like that. And dogs, they were saying dogs would howl, stand a – heads up, and they said that's for the war, bad things are coming. That's what people were talking, you know.

Q: That's what people were talking.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And –

Q: That dogs were howling.

A: Yeah, yeah. And a group of them were standing with heads up and howl, and they said that's for the war, you know. And then when the Russians came, then –

Q: Do you remember seeing Russian soldiers?

A: Oh, yeah, oh yeah. That – I remember, but I never went – like my sister went to **Krupa**(ph) there to ask about my dad. I stay home. But when they came to arrest my dad first time, I remember that they took all the pictures from the wall, anyplace they could find my dad's, and took with them. And then – wait, that was second time –

Q: Yeah.

A: – because first time I wasn't there –

Q: Yeah.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: – he was – okay. And then they came to look for their gun, and he – parent was saying they gave already the gun, they don't have it. But anyway, they went through – through the house, and then told my dad to dress up good, and you will be coming with us. And the last day when he was hugging me, he had tears in the eyes, so –

Q: And you remember that.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: And we –

A: I never seen him with tears in the eyes before. So he knew that – what will – might – could happen, you know. So th –

Q: And di – were you crying when he left?

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah. So that was the first thing we lost, my dad.

Q: And – and do you remember the soldiers who came to take him?

A: Yeah. Well, that one that was nephew of my neighbor, yeah that late – I remember that, and –

Q: What did he look like?

A: Now, I think he was tall and well-built, I think. But the face – well, I saw him on **Siberia** in ou-our camp. He –

Q: Really?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: He came there, yeah. But the faces, I know that were more rough looking face, that's about it.

Q: Was he deported too?

A: But funny way.

Q: Well, how did he get deported?

A: Okay, he came with his – I think he was like ma – maybe nephew of that family, our neighbors.

Q: Okay.

A: But he came with them to – to **Teshuava**(ph), and then after I don't know what the length of the time, he went back to **Poland** because his sister, they left in hospital. So I guess he went to bring this sister, or check, I don't know. And then when he came back, then she was, I think, when he came to **Poland**, then she died already, and he came back.

Q: So he was deported?

A: Yeah, but –

Q: With his family, but was allowed to go back to **Poland** to visit his sister?

A: Yes, yes, yes. And that was not even – his parents, that was our – that was probably – I know that he was a nephew of my neighbor.

Q: That's right.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: But apparently those people, maybe uncle, was his uncle or something.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know.

Q: Okay, but at any rate, you remember seeing him –

A: Yes.

Q: And you n – you could recognize him?

A: Yeah, because he was in – came back to **Chicago**, too.

Q: Really?

A: He joined the Polish army later on, went to pol – to join the Polish army from **Siberia**.

Q: So the man who was responsible for your father's arrest –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – eventually gets deported himself, and along with your neighbors –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – the man who – the – his aunt had been belorus –

A: Our neighbor.

Q: – your neighbor. She was **Belorussian**, her husband was Polish.

A: Yes.

Q: And they were deported.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Yes.

Q: And you saw them in **Siberia**.

A: Yeah.

Q: And yet he was allowed to go visit his sister –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – who was dying in a hospital in **Poland**.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And came back afterwards.

A: Yeah. And my sister can tell you more about him because she ma – if I – I think she – a few times she met him in **Chicago**. I – I – I don't think I saw on the picture, but I don't think that I saw him eye to eye, because I went to convent when I was 16.

Q: We'll talk about that.

A: Yeah.

Q: So – so you remember soldiers coming – that is, you remember sole – a lot of Russians soldiers, but you didn't go out and see them, as your sister had. Did you see –

A: Yeah, and tha-that first time no, I didn't go –

Q: Okay.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: – to **Krupa**(ph).

Q: To **Krupa**(ph).

A: To **Krupa**(ph).

Q: That was when your father was arrested the first time.

A: First time, yes.

Q: But when – when soldiers actually crossed the border –

A: Yeah.

Q: – did you see any of them pass by your house?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Okay.

A: I – it – we – I just don't remember.

Q: Yeah, well you were nine years old.

A: Yeah, and I – I – I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: But I h-heard that they were coming, you know, with tanks and that, in our neighborhood – through – in our – our neighborhood, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: In village, which was, I don't know, three, four kilometers away, and things like that.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Okay. And after your father was taken away, what happened in your family?

What – how – what – how did things go on?

A: Well, I know that my brother and my sister tried to help my mom, took care of the fish in that winter pool, and feed the animals. They did all that stuff, I didn't, you know.

Q: Okay. So you had – as your sister explained earlier, you were – your father had ponds where he raised carp.

A: Y-Yes.

Q: And he had to move them from the summer pond to the winter pond.

A: Right.

Q: And after he was arrested, then – then your sister and your brother were taking care of these chores.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Of that, and the animals –

A: Yeah.

Q: – and the farm, okay. And did you – did your mother still have help around the house?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: No, not any more, because that lady came from village **Brantowce**, that was across the river, I don't know how many kilometers, and demanded help. Dad, he lived there too. So once the Russians came, everything stop.

Q: Everything stopped.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Okay. What's your next memory then, of that time?

A: When they came to pick us up.

Q: What was that like?

A: Well, what happened – what I remember, I was in bed sleeping, and then all of a sudden I woke up. I was covered up with my head with the blanket. Apparently my mom wanted to hide me. So all of a sudden that noise next room, doors were closed, and I try to sit down. And then – and baby crying and all that stuff. And underneath that door I saw light in the next room. So I sat down and that minute when I sit down, door open, and the police – that was a soldier, and he saw something moving in bed, right away pointed the gun with bayonet at me. And from that time, he was after me. Then I wanted to go to washroom. I ha-had to go outside. So he follow me. And halfway I turn around to see, and he was there walking with the gun after me. So after I was done, went back to the house, and then that – all noise and, you know, *troi* – the things were laying on the bed – floors, and bringing in the stuff.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Then the only thing what I did, try to save my pictures that I have a few pictures in envelope of myself from school and that. So I was protecting them, and I put in the pocket, my jacket pocket, and then apparently, when the soldier put my dad's long coat on me, and carry me to the sled, apparently somehow that must fall out, that pictures, because when I was on the sled I started looking, couldn't find. So I cry, because that's only – I treasure the pictures, you know. That's all what –

Q: That's all you had.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that's all. And then when they took us, I know that they said that two hours we have to get ready. But how long it took for them to come back, because some of them had to go and pick up neighbors from our settlement.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: That's why they had to go and bring them to join us.

Q: Oh, I see, so it wasn't that the neighbors were outside in the sleds waiting for you.

A: No, no –

Q: No.

A: – they had to – and then bring them back.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: I see.

A: And so by that time, you know, we were already packed too. And then when we were on this sled, and that when sled tip over, and that one good soldier, he was in charge of group of them. And when he saw that, he came running, and he starts scolding the driver. He says, don't you see they have baby. Why don't you be more careful, don't – you know. And then he start helping us.

Q: This is the second day. That is, the first day –

A: Yeah.

Q: – you're taken by the sled to this place, this palace.

A: Right.

Q: And then the second day, as you're taken to the train station –

A: Yes.

Q: – your sled tips over. And why did it tip over? Was the driver driving too fast?

A: Or maybe the hole was the in ground, and that's covered up with snow. That could be the reason, you know.

A2: It was a turn.

A: Yeah, or turn, okay. But something like that, that if he would be careful, it wouldn't –

Q: It wouldn't have happened.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: But that one soldier was like – probably he has the family –

Q: Yeah.

A: – left the family, you know, and had to go to, you know – but he was the one to rub us, faces, and this, to protect us –

Q: So he would ru –

A: – from freezing.

Q: – he would rub your faces so they wouldn't be cold?

A: Yeah, i – because when he saw that they are turning white, then he knows that it's – could freeze, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: With the snow sometimes, you know. And that's how, you know, they – we were taught in **Siberia** how to protect ourselves too, you know.

Q: Well, that sounds – it truly does sound like this – this was an amazing soldier.

A: Yes, that – and then he – sometimes he would come and sit with the driver, where my mom sat, and they were talking – with my mom he was talking, you know.

Q: Oh, really?

A: For – from time to time, because my mom fluently –

Q: Spoke Russian?

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: – spoke Russians, you know. So he was unusual.

Q: Yeah.

A: Wouldn't be for him, we will be really in bad shape.

Q: And so I'm going to repeat a little bit of what your sister had said, is –

A: Okay.

Q: – what made him special is that when, at four o'clock in the morning, everybody in your house was woken up to get ready –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – because you're being deported, when the other soldiers left, he helped – he stayed and he helped your mother pack what she needed to pack.

A: Right, that I know.

Q: So, ge-get items and so on, and helped move them into the sled.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And in the meantime, the other soldiers were going to your other neighbors' houses, because they were being deported, too. Is that right?

A: Mm-hm. There are few –

Q: From the settlement.

A: – I don't know, two or three other families. I don't know, one –

A2: Two.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: – two. Two more.

Q: Two other families.

A: But they live farther away, so it took time for them to get there and come back.

Q: So – and that is why you had this extra time?

A: Right.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. All right. So, tell me if – of any other memory you had on – of the trip going to that train station?

A: Okay. When we get – came by the train, I know that aunt or the grandma, since they found out that – that we are there in that procession, that she follow. And then when they were putting us in the train, she was there with her husband, and she talk with my mom and then she said, I will take **Irena** to when gi – it will be il – it – il – easier for you with three children than four children. But I hanged my mom's hand so tight, and she was pulling on the other hand. She couldn't pull me off. I cry.

Q: You didn't want to go with her.

A: I cry, and beg my mom not to – so I won.

Q: You won.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: But without my mom and my sister, I'd – I wouldn't survive, you know, because I was very close with, you know, them both. Even I was treating bad my sister, but I love her.

Q: Do you think you made the right decision –

A: Yes.

Q: – at an age nine.

A: Oh yes.

Q: Yeah?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Even though it meant **Siberia**?

A: Oh yeah, but I was with Mother.

Q: Yeah.

A: And when you have Mother, you have everything. Once you lose, you lose everything. It's – you see, we lost Father, we lost country, but we had Mother, and that what kept us, you know. And we try to help her, you know, as much as we could.

Q: Tell me about the journey.

A: Okay. The first train in **Bialystok**, when we boarded –

A2: **Wolkowysk**.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: – **Wolkowysk**, I know was very tight, and I think my mom was on the first –

Q: Level?

A: Yeah. But we – I don't n – remember in the first train. I remember good in second. And then when locomotive make the noise, beep and that, that real – real terrible sound letted out, and then trains start pulling, and my mom fainted, because she knew where they are taking us. So I think twice she – she fainted.

Q: She fainted?

A: Yeah. That I remember.

Q: And was your brother crying, your baby brother?

A: At that time I don't know, but maybe not, at that time. But we knew that – my mom, we thought that she died, you know.

Q: You were frightened.

A: Oh yes.

Q: Okay.

A: So that I remember, because she went through World War I, orphan and all that stuff, so she knew what was waiting us, you know.

Q: Tell me about the second train.

A: Okay –

Q: You say that – what happened that you moved from one train to another?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Because of the tracks. I don't know, did we had wider tracks, or **Russia** has wide

–

Q: I think **Russia** has wider tracks.

A: So they had to move us –

Q: Okay.

A: – change. And there they had two –

Q: Platforms.

A: Plat – yeah, and we were on – my sister and I was on top. I think my – the same
my – with on top, and my moth – moth – mom and brother was on lower. And we
had that little door – no –

Q: Window.

A: – window that was narrow but longer, and we were the lucky one there.

Q: You could look through the window?

A: Yes, take turns, you know. And was so cold, and you have the big screws on the
wall. They were rusted, and we were thirsty, so I was licking that, because I wanted
to drink. And when – on station, when – on bigger station, the train will stop, then
my brother would run and pick up snow. They let us, I think 10 minutes to – that we
can go out. And like my ti – sister says, you had to go number – you know –

Q: You had to go to the bathroom, then it was outside.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: But sure, I just would turn around to the pu – to the soldier, because th – they always stood with those rifles, and make my business and went back to, you know, at that time, when we were going that way, you know. Okay, that's –

Q: And that's what you remember from the train?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, that I remember.

Q: It's pretty frightening.

A: Well, sure.

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh yeah, but we had Mother. That's why for us – for us, you know, we didn't worry, because we have her for protection, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: So –

Q: And do you – do you remember how long the tourney – the journey took?

A: Yes, that – I think March five, or six, or third – I think – wait a minute. March seven, we arrive in **Teshuava**(ph), and left on February 10. So that's a month without three days.

Q: Okay, so the journey took almost a month –

A: Yes.

Q: – to get there.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Yes.

Q: And what else – what can you tell me about how things proceeded after that?

A: Okay, when we came to the end of the train station, I don't know the name of that, my sister should know, then we had to leave the train in the – on the sleds, then we had to go – transfer to the sleds. And like my sister said, the same thing, for night we would stop in the village, and we had to – my mom had to pay something to those people, and so that's about it, and they gave us hot water that was good, you know. But they didn't had much food for themselves, so they didn't treat with that. And on the floor we slept. But it – on – in one house, that older lady, she kind of liked my mom, I guess, and she – I know – I remember because I was following my mom and she was holding the baby, and she says, I want to show you something. And she went through the house and came to the corner of one room, and she showed her, uncovered, and she showed that holy picture. And she says, I cannot show to my own children or grandchildren, because they would tell in school, and they will come and arrest her. So she kept – you know, they kept themselves, you know.

Q: Very quiet.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: But they bil – tell me, do you remember what that little house looked like?

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: No.

Q: No.

A: I just remember that the room where that – she had that holy picture, that's all.

But what she had, those things didn't interest me, just that –

Q: The picture.

A: – holy picture, you know, that she had hidden.

Q: Okay. And tell me what happened after that.

A: Okay, so the next day, get back on the sled, keep going. Going there, I could ride.

Q: Mm-hm, on the sled.

A: And I think my sister could ride, I don't remember if she all the time she could ride. And when we came to – few times we stay for the night, you know. Then when we came to our camp **Teshuava**(ph), then, like my sister told you, with those barracks, they had four and four – you know, one entrance on each side, and they had four rooms in each. And on the end they had barrack with – if somebody – if they would arrest, they will put you there, in that barrack. And like if the mother would – wouldn't want you – send the child to school, Russian school, then she will be arrested and put there.

Q: I see. Were there a lot of people who were –

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: I – that I don't know.

Q: – kept in those barracks?

A: That I don't know, but the – we were told that's what – and that – that guy that came, bra – brought – drove the taxi to come to pick da – my dad up, you know, to – he lived someplace in that area.

Q: So when he – was he on another transport?

A: That I don't – I don't know if they – he came on the same transport. Probably.

Prob – but not in our car, not – you know. It could be in the same transport, you know, because I think just one transport they brought –

Q: Everybody.

A: – right there, you know, to our camp.

Q: Uh-huh. So he's the one who had come to first arrest your father, or – or did he arrive to second arrest your father, the second time –

A: Second – wait –

Q: Second time.

A: – second time, because the first time I do – he went to the village –

Q: Right.

A: – get my dad, so I don't know what happened.

Q: And that was January fifth, and a month later, he himself gets deported –

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Yes.

Q: – along with that – those neighbors of yours.

A: Wait a minute. What do you mean –

Q: Well, his aunt – he had an aunt who was your neighbor.

A: No, no, not the aunt, no, she wasn't our aunt, his aunt –

Q: That's right. Was she deported too?

A: No.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: No, they stayed.

Q: They stayed, but he himself was deported. Okay.

A: That – but he lived with her in the village – I don't know **Markhelowsta**(ph) or something, with hi – whi – he was raised there, and his parents were there.

Q: So the –

A: So he didn't live with the aunt in **Poland**.

Q: You didn't know why he was deported, or did you? No.

A: No.

Q: Did you have any contact with him while you were in **Tushela**(ph) –
Tushelova(ph) or something?

A: Oh, I have to tell you that.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Yeah?

A: They had the big family, he was the biggest one and I – nobody think that he was a son of that family. And every day I would sit by that little table by the window, just little table like – like this, from this to this, and watch people coming from the store. He was the only one, many times he would go for the bread. He was the only one bringing big loaf of white bread. And – and – and – and besides that lo – big white bread, because that's well baked so you – you get more, and I think some of that black, but –

Q: You'd have a –

A: – and I was always sitting and dreaming, oh, if I could have that piece of bread. And my – one time my – my mom send my sister for bread and she says, ask them if they could give white bread so she could give to baby. And she came back, she says no, they wo – they didn't gave. He says, we don't have. But that family always could get, every day.

Q: Isn't that interesting.

A: Yeah, that's – and I never forgot that, because I – you dream ya – how much food you had in **Poland**. So when you are starving, you always have that in mind. You see that big table with food, full of food.

Q: And why do you think he was able to get this bread?

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: No idea. But I make sure that I will be in that window watching him, and thinking how must been really ta – good to have piece of bread like that. So that's all what I know.

Q: Did he ever speak to you, or you spoke to him?

A: No, no. He wa – I was kid, and he was grown-up, I don't know how old he was, maybe more than 20, huh?

Q: Yeah.

A: No idea, but well-built, tall and well-built, you know. That's a –

Q: Okay. Hang on – hang on just a second. I know that you are sitting there in the background, Mrs. **Stanislawa**, is this a gentleman – did he belong to that family that informed on other people?

A2: He was as – just related.

Q: He was related to them.

A2: But – but he came all the way here because he was the one of the people that was telling on other Polish meetings, and whatever. And so his – his treatment of the family was by – as a reward for – for that.

Q: Okay, so what – what your sister said is – in her testimony she said that there was one family who got better treatment because they would inform on others. And I asked whether this man who had been involved in the arrest of your father, was in

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

any way part of this family. And she said yes, he is related to them, and he got better treatment because he informed on what other people were doing. Have I got that right?

A2: Right.

Q: Yeah, okay. Thank you. Do you remember his name?

A: His name, no. But that other name –

A2: [indecipherable]

A: That other name of family, the boy was going with me to school in **Mexico**.

Q: Really?

A: He was with parents – oh, I think he – he had both parents, I think, and I was in orphanage, but in school they kept together. Was very nice boy that – my age right away, too. So that [indecipherable] you know, what have you, was really nice.

Q: And so you remembered this. What was – what else do you remember about when you first arrived, and saw those barracks, and saw where you would be living? Can you tell us, you know, what that looked like?

A: Well, it was a cold place, that's one thing, because when we came in there's no fire, no nothing. So the one – I remember everything what was there. The bed, made from boards, bigger bed on one side, and one on that, and that little table with two – I don't know, benches –

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Stools?

A: Stools, I think, on both sides – no, i – okay, but ther –

Q: Stools.

A: – for one person. And that stove was in that corner, and I think, like my sister says, that was – on our side, in that corner was that metal bed where my da – brother, when he came, would come when he had rheumatoid arthritis, he would hang to that bed, you know, from the pain, you know. And you could hear that movement he was making with that bed, from the pain, you know. So that – that's – you know –

Q: That's what you remember.

A: Yeah, oh yeah.

Q: Yeah. Do you remember, did anybody come and tell you why you were there –

A: Mm-mm.

Q: – why you had been arrested?

A: No, not here, but in **Poland** we knew, because my dad was taking part in World War I fighting, and I think my – when they were collecting like gold or something for the country, then my dad and – gave his, and my mom's wedding band, donated. And so that, for that, I think that's what they put –

Q: As the reason?

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: – in his rec-record – record, you know. That I remember, because that's what Dad was to – telling, you know.

Q: I see. So when he was released from the first arrest, he said that – that one of the reasons he was arrested was because of that, because of se – you know, his giving some things to support the Polish army.

A: Yeah, yeah. And they kept records so well, because they knew what he – what he did in the life that he – they knew that he had a gun, a rifle or something, but they took already that one, before the end, you know.

Q: Mm-hm. Do you remember when they took the gun? Were you in the house?

A: That I don't remember vividly, when they came for that, but I know that they did, because my parents were mentioning that, you know, few times.

Q: Okay. And now we've just digressed to talk about back in **Poland**, you know, before that – you were deported. So let's go back to this area. Where – what did the forest look like? Were you in the middle of a forest?

A: No. The forest, one piece was on the side, on one side of our settle –

Q: Your settle – your camp.

A: [**indecipherable**] camp, the houses, because we have house. We had three – three or four buildings besides that, you know. And so that was farther there. Then one far, far away there, in that direction, and then fields, and then on the other side.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: So the forests were not close in –

A: No.

Q: – they were further away.

A: Yeah, but this one was the closest because it fr – I think when they were building their house, then they were cutting that –

Q: Forest.

A: – forest by the house there. And you could see it there.

Q: And what kind of trees were they, were they –

A: Wait a minute, how you call them? Pines, yeah, pines –

Q: Pines.

A: – a lot.

Q: Pine tree, okay.

A: Yeah, na – a lot. But in one section of the forest, on that side, they had, I think,

brzozowy in Poland – Polish, quite –

A2: Birch.

A: Birch.

Q: Got it.

A: And the only place that the mushrooms grew is in that –

Q: Oh.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: – and that's where we used to like to go.

Q: Mushroom picking.

A: Yeah. And this one had a little blueberries, you know, and strawberries, wild, on the outskirts of –

Q: On the outskirts.

A: So – so we were lucky, you know.

Q: Yeah. So – so the settlement, it sounds like this camp area was in a – in an open place, surrounded –

A: Wait, you are talking about **Poland**, right?

Q: No, I was talking –

A: Oh, wait a minute, I was talking about **Poland**.

Q: You were talking about your land in **Poland**?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh, no, no, no, no, that's your home in **Poland** you were talking about.

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: No, I'm talking about where you were deported to.

A: Oh, okay. So, when we were driving, I think, with the train, and with this sled, what you saw, trees, trees, trees. When they came, that's why they could transport

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

people in the winter when is everything frozen, because in the area we were, it was swamps, lakes, trees.

Q: Okay.

A: So that – otherwise, in the summer, you cannot escape from there. And then –

Q: Why?

A: Because –

Q: Are you surrounded by water?

A: Swamps.

Q: Okay.

A: And water, and trees, you know. There's no end of the woods. And when they brought us to camp **Teshuava**(ph), that used to be trees, but they cut that out for – to make the camp. So that's – on one side is the lake, big lake, I think 26 kilometers long, and four or six ki –

Q: Wide?

A: – wide, yeah. So here we have lake, and then, surrounded by – by woods. But little distance, you know, for the camp f – we had f-for buildings. And that way is north, or what have you. Then hi – there was a hill, and there was a cemetery. And to the left, there was a field for them, that guy that was in charge of camp. So he grew there – I know one – tomat – potatoes he was grow, because one time, after

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

they already collected the potatoes, harvest the potatoes, then I went, toward the evening, to cemetery. And then next to was the field, and I thought, maybe I will find something. So I was looking. I don't remember if I found any piece of potato. But then, when I stood there on that hill on cemetery and looked down, I felt like I am bird in the cage.

Q: Really?

A: Just see the opening this, and then all woods. So that's – that never – I never forgot that, you know.

Q: So you felt – you were on the top of a hill.

A: Yeah, that's cemetery was higher up. It wasn't real tall, but it was a hill, you know.

Q: Was it a large cemetery?

A: Oh, pretty – pretty nice size, but how many? That – I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: And what – all else you could – under trees, when you walking – walk in that trees – woods, on some trees you have – you could see they carved names. And also, in our room, under the table, when you go underneath, you see some names carved in, so that people, they were before us there.

Q: Yeah.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: But on the trees, some of them, they had too.

Q: They also had their names.

A: Yeah, yeah. So we weren't the first ones to be sende there and die in that place, you know.

Q: What was the camp manager like?

A: Well, I – I don't know, but apparently he must be not too bad if he gave my mom a glass of milk for baby, because he couldn't give you much, because if he had one cow, you know?

Q: And he did that one time, huh?

A: I don't know how many times, but my sister was saying that, you know.

Q: He gave a glass of milk.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: So he must be not bad, you know.

Q: Your brother – your older brother, tell me – tell me what he looked like when he went out to work, and when he came back.

A: Okay, so next day they had to go, and they told him to pack, and you have to leave tomorrow with a-adults. And they took them about, I don't know, I don't – that stuck in my head somehow, 30 kilme – kilometers deep in the woods, where

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

they had to cut the trees, and then bring that to the shores, when the lake was – or river was frozen. That's what – whole winter they were doing that. And –

Q: Was there a camp kitchen? Was there like a cafeteria?

A: They had u – they had kitchen that they had big, big, big that kettle, and they make soup, using dry fish and some noodles, but – but when you got that soup, you were lucky if you had one or two noodles. You got more worms floating on that, because from dry fish, you know, they spoil, and the worms take over. So that's – and one scoop, you know, like soup scoop –

Q: Did you –

A: – you get.

Q: Mm-hm. Was –

A: And then 40 grams of bread if you had money to buy, for each child or person, that they didn't [indecipherable]

Q: So you had – you had a ration, but you had to also pay for this ration.

A: Yes, yes. That's why we try to help my mom. We'd go after school and cut wood to – to get some money, or go for cranberry – picking cranberry in the – deep in the woods, to sell, so we will get few ca – cents, you know, for that. Yeah. And then we had to – we wanted to help my mom, so we would go, two of us, take the sled, take the saw that's for two people, and cut the tree down, and then cut in

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

pieces, put on the sled and drag, because it was maybe half hour – half mile, or – or more, yeah. And that's – you see that in the summer, the swamps, so they put the big logs where you are walking. In the winter that's frozen, so you could walk through –

Q: You could walk on that, yeah.

A: – on that, you know, that help. But we drag that in. But my mom says, I told you don't cut so big trees. It take – you know – but we wanted to do the best we could. And we knew how to cut because then, when tree was falling, when we found out and we'd [indecipherable] and we will shout, you know, some expression we had, and run to –

Q: Run to that place, yeah.

A: So, you know, but –

Q: Tell me about your brother, your little brother.

A: Oh, that – you see, when he die on the – the last minutes, I was in the room, and my mom – he was crying. He had wounds on the neck, and she said, hold his hand, so she wanted to get something. And I'm holding the hand, and he jerk, and start scratching, and that start bleeding. And when I saw that, I faint. And poor mother, I know that she pick me up, put me on the bed, and took care of the baby. But I don't

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

know if that was on that day that he die, or next day, but that's what – I have bad memory of that.

Q: Was he very – had – did he – did he – had he lost – did he have any meat on him, was he skin and bones, was he starving?

A: Oh, he was starving, for sure, because when my mom had leftover honey cake from **Poland**, when she finished that, the bread she couldn't give him, because that was too hard for his stomach. So I don't know what she was giving him, but not what he needed. And that's why my mom sent my sister to the store, to ask for white bread if they could give at least one pe – little piece of it, you know, but he says no, we don't have. But he had for –

Q: Somebody –

A: – for them.

Q: Yeah.

A: For them he always had. So I guess that's, you know, what life –

Q: That was very bitter.

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: And do you remember how you buried your brother?

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me about it.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: They had – I don't know who put together the – from the boards, the box, you know. I say box because, you know. And the – a little girl died at this same time, so they put two together in the one coffin.

Q: In one box – coffin?

A: Yeah, she in one side the head, and my baby brother –

A2: No, there were two coffins, there was not –

A: I don't – I s –

A2: The [indecipherable] was only one.

A: I reme – oh, I don't know, but I saw them two laying there. Because that's winter, very –

A2: They were in a grave, but not –

A: In the grave though, we had the one. So I don't know, maybe, you know –

Q: Your sister is saying that he had his own little coffin –

A2: Yeah [indecipherable]

A: Oh, okay.

Q: And that she had her coffin.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay.

A: But I had something in the head like this, so that's a –

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Tha-That there were two of them.

A: But then we went and – every day went to take care of the grave, and we really loved him, and t-took him for walks, and it was – and that's what my mom said, wouldn't be for him, she wouldn't survive.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, he was keeping her – because she knew that without her, he wouldn't survive too, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So what happened with her later?

A: My mom?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Oh, like when we were in **Vologda** –

Q: No, no, I meant, not in **Vologda**, but I mean, after he died.

A: Oh. Oh, she was very sad, but the life had to go on. Oh yeah, one time – I don't know, was there two policemen, or what, two military guys, or what. Two – I think two of them came, and they were going through – all around, and looking for children to take to orphanage, especially the ones that the mothers couldn't work. And they came, and they wanted to take my sister and me. And they didn't – babies they wouldn't take. And we begged my mom – they needed her permission, so we cry and beg. So he says, I will come toward the evening, and see what, you know,

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

my mom will – what decision she will make. So whole day we just hang around her and begging not to give us. And when they came, she says no, I won't give them, you take this baby. And they said no, we ca – we – we want those older ones. And they left. So we stay with our mom. So that second time that I almost lost – separated in **Poland**, and now second time.

Q: Right, right, from her.

A: Yeah.

Q: And it was – and they wanted – th-they – was it that they wanted that she be for – be able to go to work?

A: No, because she couldn't work. So this way they knew that she has hardship.

A2: They would kill her.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: So that's – I think that's the reason.

Q: Wait, I – I don't understand, that she had ha – they wanted to take you, so that –

A: She will have easier.

Q: So that she would have it easier?

A: Yeah, I guess.

A2: No.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: No? Well, you can ask her.

Q: Your sister is saying no. She thinks – what do you think?

A2: I think they would take her and – and destroy her.

Q: Your sister is thinking –

A: I don't know.

Q: – that they – if they took you two, then they would have been able to take her out and – and shoot her or destroy her in some way.

A: That I don't know.

Q: Yeah, but you know – yeah, it sounds like in both cases, it's supposition. You don't know really why –

A: Yeah.

Q: – why they –

A: Yeah.

Q: – were doing this, or wanted to do this.

A2: They would do the same what they did with the old people there.

Q: I see, I see. Now, did you go to school in this camp?

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me a little about that.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Well, we had two in Russian, and they were pretty good teachers because they would teach us how to write so nicely from one line to the other, the letters had to be. And math was good too, and like they were teaching the – that no – there is no God, we had in my class from the same thing. Now when the teacher would go and do inspection about each child, and when we – I had the medal, I would put underneath chair's leg, to hide it. So this way – otherwise, he would take away from me.

Q: Oh, you mean a religious medal?

A: Yeah, oh yeah. And – but – and then we had to learn a lot of poems, Russian poems, everything Russian. And one time, I was going to school in the morning, was very, very windy, and that gate was loose, had loose boards, and the wind blew, and that big nail, rusted nail went with – in my knee here –

Q: In your leg.

A: – in the bone, all the way to bone. So my mom kept me at home, because I was getting infection, and – and one time teacher came to check on me if I am really sick, because otherwise she would lock hi – her in that last –

Q: That jail room.

A: Yeah. And she had to open up, and then show him that –

Q: That you're really sick.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Yeah, and with chamomile, she ra – she – she managed to heal that. But I had to lay all the time in. But that was the only mirac – thing that she could have.

Q: That she could think of, yeah.

A: Yeah, and that we found – well, maybe from **Poland** we had some, you know.

Q: Okay, so tell me about how you learned that you could leave the camp.

A: Amnesty came. Amnesty, in July 30, 1941.

Q: Did you hear about it soon, the – in – on July 3rd, or it – that's when it was given in the **United States**?

A: I don't know how we heard, but we heard, and then that's why the man from deep, from the woods there, that my brother – where was my broth – they were coming because they say th-they don't have any jobs for them. So ev-everybody at ki – in the camp didn't – lost their jobs.

Q: Okay.

A: And people didn't had money, they run out of what they have money. So that's why, you know – and then in – when they – my brother heard about the Polish army forming, you know, then, like she told you about the few, those boys in his age, and older men, one or more, they join and went – left us. And that's what, you know, you have your information there.

Q: Okay. And do you remember leaving the camp?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: I know that the sleds came, but my mom wasn't pack, and she felt – she has premonition, bad premonition not to leave, you know. And she didn't want to leave the baby there, either, you know. And we beg her, and she just was walking forth and back. And then one man that was nice to us, you know, that many times helped, I think, with the trunk and things like that. He came and start hel – putting things, packing and taking to sled. But our mom didn't want to leave.

Q: She didn't want to leave the camp?

A: No. Something – she felt that bad things will happen, something.

Q: Isn't that –

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: I think she – she had, few times, you know, she mentioned, that came true later on.

Q: But eventually she did leave?

A: Yes.

Q: And you did leave.

A: Yes.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: And where did you go?

A: Oh, to the first – that's when we could – we – all of us couldn't ride. My mom could, and I don't know if one of – that both of us couldn't ride. I think the horses was probably very tired, or something. And so, like my sister says, we were walking, and one – I don't know if which day was that, if that's as first or second day. We wanted my mom not to worry, so we thought we will run ahead of the – all the – those sleds. So we ran, ran, ran, until we couldn't see them. Then we got cold, and we waited, you know for them to come. And next morning, I woke up, I couldn't stand up on my feet, my legs swell all the way here, like big, you know. So my mom had to carry me, and she, you know, she shouldn't heavy – lift me at all. And so she begged that lady that was driving, if she could – one more person could get the ride. So she – something she gave her that finally she agreed. So I was sitting and my sister was walking behind. And in the snow, to walk, that's not picnic.

Q: No.

A: It's very – and those – when you ride, that's so many sleds, and that ro – the snow froze, and that makes that special noise when our sn – in **Chicago** we get below z – zero. When I went to feed my birds, when I walk, that's the noise my feet was making. It's special, that noise, you know.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Mm-hm, it crunches, in some ways.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Yes.

A: And you hear all that noise that, you know, because so many sleds riding.

Anyway, so then on, my sister – and then from time to time my mom will exchange her, you know.

Q: So – but – but basically – basically you were able to now ride, but your mom would sometimes let your sister sit further –

A: Yeah, because she felt so sorry for my sister, and my sister felt sorry for my mom, you know. And I felt sorry for both of them, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I felt guilty sitting there.

Q: What could you do?

A: Yeah, I know.

Q: [indecipherable] What could you do? And so eventually you reached what place?

A: Oh, the first –

Q: Place.

A: Don't ask me for names, because she is the one with the names.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Okay.

A2: Was.

A: Now the book.

Q: Yeah, the book, the book.

A: So we stop for the night again, and I think that's where my mom gave something to that woman to, you know, to bri –

Q: You mean the knit hat?

A: Maybe that, I don't know.

A2: My skirt.

A: Oh okay.

A2: Pleated.

A: Oh, okay.

Q: The pleated skirt.

A: Oh, okay, it's – so I could sit there.

Q: That's right, okay.

A: To make her one like that.

Q: Yeah. And tell me, when you got to the train station, what is that like?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Oh, I – now, this one, we got – that’s where we – we got – that was di-divided into – so my sister and I on top, and my mom on the – we didn’t had the brother already, so my mom was on the bottom, I guess, I think, if I am not –

Q: Mistaken.

A: – or maybe she was – maybe – I don’t think she was on top with us.

Q: Okay.

A: There were another two girls next to –

Q: And was it – was this an open car, or was this covered?

A: Covered.

Q: Covered, okay.

A: We did long window, too.

Q: Okay.

A: They –

Q: So it looked the same as the other cars that you had come – been deported in?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: And – and so, what happened after that?

A: After?

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: After you got into the car –

A: Okay. Then, like she says to – I don't know was **Vologda** first big stop, I think. And because Germans were fighting close to **Moscow**, that's why they didn't know which way the train should go. They planned the way we came, they brought us to **Siberia** around **Moscow**. So they went – wait until they got orders, and so every day they were telling us, we are leaving, we are leaving, okay. And then when they really took us, that we were – they took us through **Uran**(ph) mountains. So to escape –

Q: And was your mom with you at this point?

A: Not any more.

Q: So, in other word –

A: After we left **Vologda**, we were two of us.

Q: So you lost your mom in **Vologda**?

A: Yes.

Q: **Vologda**.

A: And day before, my mom – we – she went to buy the bread, I went with her. And when we were coming close to the – to the car, she says, what you would do when you lose me? I said, I never will lose you. But apparently she was –

Q: She was – felt something?

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Something. And when you si – we were standing, I think two of us, we were in to – standing in the line, when we still had my mom, for that soup and bread. And there was wen – man came in, and he was begging you know, to give him something, you know. And nobody pay attention to him, then he fall on the ground and start –

Q: Shaking.

A: – convulsing.

Q: Convulsing.

A: And he died. And what happened, because when you stand in the line there are windows, you can see what's going on, in the early mar – morning, the sled comes with two guys, and they are just – one time, there were persons sitting on the bench, was dead, frozen. So they just pick him up, throw on the sled, and keep going, and – but that we witness. And you never forget that. So – and then one – when we were still on the sled, I think going that way, ba – to the freedom, some – when we came to one station, and big noises were ca – somebody was making. So my – our mom went to si – when they came to the stop, she went to see. And that's a person was freezing to death. So they – he must die. And they picked him up, throw on the sled, and –

Q: Take him away.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: – where they took – take to some big hole, probably. That's the way, you know.

Q: And so, describe to me how it was that your ma – describe ho-how – how it happened that you got split from your mom.

A: Okay, like my sister was saying, that – now, that happened – I know what happened the last minute. I woke up. That's what I remember, and that stay in my head. I was sleeping, and then I heard soldiers coming and banging on the door, we are leaving. So I – I knew that my mom is not there, when I open my – and so I put my jacket on my pajama, shoes without socks, and I wanted – I said, I know where she is, I will go and call. And then some man caught me by the arms, and he held, and the doors closed, and that's it. That's what –

Q: You remember.

A: – remember what I did.

Q: Okay.

A: But I know that some other boy went before that, to call those people. That happened before, but this is the last time before they closed the door. And then, when that happened – I think my sister says that the train back up a little bit, and this, and we thought that was stay in the station, so we were happy. But then he changed the tracks, and took off. And was just going so fast. Never before like that, so fast. To us, that's what it felt, and so here we – we just cry all the time.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: So it meant your mother had left the train to get some food?

A: Yeah, with few people.

Q: With a few people –

A: Early in the morning –

Q: – and –

A: – when we were sleeping.

Q: – and she had not come back yet, and the train suddenly starts leaving.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And it had been stalled for a long time, where every day –

A: A mo – a week or something.

Q: For a week or something, where every day, people would – it was said that the train would leave –

A: Yeah.

Q: – but it never did.

A: Right, right.

Q: And s –

A: So people didn't believe.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: And I think that one lady that was kind of pressing on my mom to – to come, because at first she didn't want to go.

Q: To go to get food?

A: Yeah, uh-huh. Because she – you know, you never know.

Q: You never know. You never know.

A: But yeah, you take chances.

Q: So how did your journey continue?

A: Well, I – on big stations, I don't know how many times a day we stopped, I think 10 minutes they gave us. So when we right away jump out, and try to cover as much land as we could, they have very long, wide tracks, you know, wa – many tracks.

Q: Platforms, mm-hm.

A: And we would run around and call, Mommy, Mommy, where are you, as na – as loud as we could scream. And then turn back, run to – because the train would be leaving. So couple times it – we almost miss, you know, ourselves. But we thought that we will find her. So anyplace we went, we were looking for her.

Q: And how old were you at this time?

A: Eleven, I think. It was that – yeah, that's – 11 – wait, 10 e – yeah, 11.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, because that's '41, in February, so by that time it was –

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: No, if you left in 1942 –

A: If – wait –

Q: You left in 1942.

A: Oh yeah, okay, you're right. Forty-one – July 30, '41 was amnesty.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah –

Q: So –

A: – '42.

Q: So you were almost 12 years old.

A: Yeah.

Q: You were almost 12.

A: Yeah. I think six –

Q: And **Stella** was –

A: – days.

Q: – yeah, and **Stella** was how old? How old –

A2: Thirteen.

Q: Thirteen.

A: Okay, so I was –

Q: Okay.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A2: And the station was **Porog**(ph).

Q: **Porog**(ph) was the station.

A: Yeah, that's what I thought, but I wasn't sure, you know, to say. But something that name, **Porog**(ph).

A2: I found it in book.

A: Thank –

Q: Okay, so you – the station you lost your mother in was **Porog**(ph).

A: No, no, no, no. That's where we caught –

A2: When we started.

A: – start – had to come from camp with the sled –

Q: Ah, I see.

A: – and board the train.

Q: It was **Porog**(ph).

A: – that was **Porog**(ph), yeah.

Q: And you lost your mother at **Vologda**.

A: **Vologda**.

A2: Yes.

Q: **Vologda**. Okay. And so for a long time you were asking – you were leaving the train whenever it stopped at a station.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Yeah.

Q: And shouting for her, but you couldn't find her –

A: No.

Q: – she didn't answer. Tell me how your train journey then ended.

A: Okay, when they came to the end, that was in **Kyrgyzstan** already, train stop, all the people disappear from all the cars, just – and five of us left on the station.

Nobody was there, nobody came to ask, and we – we lucky we had the water, because they use for that engine. So we had the water, but we didn't had food. So then my sister and that girl was standing by our luggage, and I would go with the boys, I think one seven, one eight or nine or something. And in distance were the village. So we would go around and looking. And one time we came by the house, fenced in, and there was older man, sitting on the bench, working on the wheel, because they had those cart – ca – ca – not wagon, but with two wheels.

Q: Oh, wheelbarrow. N-No.

A: No, no, no.

Q: Some sort of a cart –

A: A cart.

Q: [indecipherable] two wheels.

A: – with big, big wheels, and a llama was pulling them.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Oh really. Oh my.

A2: A llama? Oh **[indecipherable]** I forgot.

A: And so, okay, we went – oh yeah, the man was working on wheel like that, and the woman was baking those – they call it **pirozhka**(ph). That's what we got when we went to work. You know, like pancake, big pancake with the hole in the middle. But they bake that, on the outside they have that stove, they heat it up, and then they throw that –

Q: The dough in there?

A: – dough on the walls. And when that bakes, then they pull that off. And we were just sitting, laying on that trance and watching and thinking how good that must be. And you know, when that lady finish, she came and gave us one each.

Q: Oh my.

A: Did – we ran to share with our sister.

Q: Oh wow.

A: Yeah. That was – you see, you have good people too. And amazing, when we were living by ourselves in that coal house, you know, I don't know, four or five months, nobody hurt us, nobody. But the women one time, when we open our trunk, and we had – my sister had one, and I had Polish costume, **Krakowiaka**(ph), and somebody saw from those women, and they came in the morning banging on the

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

door, we were sleeping, and making lot of noises, we were scared. Then finally we had to open the door. And they brought the cup with, to me like tapioca, but it's not tapioca, but something like that, seeds. One cup. And they were pointing, you know, something. So we figure out they wanted –

Q: The costume.

A: – costume. So my sister says, we have to give, so we decided give mine, because mine will – you know, I will grow out, later. We gave that, and they gave us that – that one cup of that –

Q: That stuff.

A: – yeah, that stuff. My sister knows what is it.

Q: Okay.

A: And then the other time, we wa – when I was roaming around on the village, then we saw that big pile, that powder, yellow powder. I didn't know what was that, but was covered with dust, so it was all gray, you know –

Q: Right.

A: – so I this, and was la – and eating, because my stomach was so hurting all the time from hunger. So I ate and ready to throw up, but I ate. So –

Q: Yeah. What was it that you were eating?

A: That was cotton seeds.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: That was those cotton seeds.

A: Yeah, yeah, I did – we didn't – I didn't know.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I think my sister was at that time, too.

Q: Well, tell me, when you got – when your train journey ended, did – did you go to the Polish – was there some Polish place to go to?

A: No, no – no place at all. That – that will – village that I went with the boys, roaming around, I don't know the distance.

Q: Okay.

A: But we didn't speak English, and those are [indecipherable] people. So –

Q: Okay, you didn't speak, okay.

A: No, and they didn't speak Russian.

Q: Okay.

A: Actually Russian. We – we spoke Russian by that time, but they didn't.

Q: I see.

A: And then, after I don't know what day, fourth, fifth day, then one guy with that cart came, and start taking – putting our things on the cart, and he says, now you walk in the back. So we follow, I think 30 kilometers or something. All day we walk.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Oh wow. You were –

A: And then he – you know, that –

Q: Yeah, yeah. So you stayed there for about three or four months?

A: Four – four or four and a half or something.

Q: Okay. And then what happened?

A: Oh, about that mattress she was making, okay, we decided to change. So we start pulling that branches, and when we came almost to the bottom, and we saw snake, big snake. So we were sleeping on this snake. So we start putting back those branches, and –

Q: This was inside your little hut?

A: Yeah, yeah. Because it was floor – sent –

Q: Dirt floor.

A: Yeah. And we covered it up, put the blanket, and then evening came, we pray, and gently lay down, because we couldn't jump like we did before, because we heard some squeaking noises, but we didn't never realize. So – but maybe he was protecting us from a rat – mouses or something.

Q: Or rats or something.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: And – and then in the evening he would come arou – on top of the door, hang in the doorway, you know.

Q: The snake?

A: Yeah. But we didn't make nothing of it, so – and then later on he hid under our mattress.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A2: Rolled up.

A: Rolled up. But that was really scary, so we always pray and cover up with the – with the blanket.

Q: Oh my.

A: And then I was running with the boys, looking for weeds. We looking for those turtles, and then they – she told you what the boys were doing –

Q: Yes, they were ea –

A: – and I feel so guilty now.

Q: Really?

A: Oh, it ca – it – killing those poor things. I couldn't do nothing, I could not put worm on the hook now, and before, you do everything.

Q: Did you eat those eggs?

A: No –

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: The turtle eggs?

A: – nothing.

Q: No?

A: But that sister of those boys, th – he – she did. She did, you know. So – and weeds, you know. And then we find the weeds, and then my sister would cook. We had two big stones, and we had some pots, you know, from – and you, put the water from the canal that was going by us – by – close by, and yell orange-y water. So – but we knew that we have to keep that dow – let that stand a little bit, to settle down.

Q: Before you would drink anything.

A: Yeah. And then I think probably my sister boiled that, you know. So, a little bit we – you know.

Q: You understood, yeah. Well, you know, as you're talking, I'm thinking, a 12 year old, and a – and a 13 year old –

A: Yeah, already.

Q: You know, you're taking care of each other, but you're still just children.

A: Yeah, yeah. Well, it wouldn't be for being two of us together, that will be very hard.

Q: Yeah.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Because some children were left by themselves, the parents and siblings died, you know –

Q: Yeah.

A: – in **Siberia**, and – and other people, some people were in different parts of the co – **Russia**, not – not north like us, you know.

Q: So, how did you leave this place?

A: This one?

Q: Yes.

A: In the –

Q: This one.

A: **Namuni**(ph) camp.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, my sister was saying – that's what she told me too, that during the lunchtime she was talk – working with that girl, and they were talki – sitting and eating and talking Polish, and the lady came, and she overheard them. So sh – that's why she came and ask about the –

Q: Where is –

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: – where – where is your mother, you know. Because you had to work when you are 12, and I wasn't 12 yet, so I – she would come home and so tired, you know. All day, you – you have to co – wait – haul – haul –

Q: Hoe something?

A: – cu – you know, like when you grow plant, you have to make higher up by the plant, how you call that?

Q: You mean, when you're p-planting the – the plant?

A: Yeah – no, when you have growing plant –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and you have to make that cup, it's for – for fors –

A2: Like roses, you do.

A: What? Hoe, or no?

Q: You have to weed it?

A: Not, not weed it.

A2: Dig around.

A: Dig around, to make higher by the plant.

Q: Oh, I see, so you have to bring – because I don't know how to do this, I'm just assuming – you have to take –

A: You have to go there

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Yeah, I have to go there to learn. That you –

A2: I'll teach you very fast.

Q: Yeah. That you take some dirt, and you kind of spread it around the plant, to make it higher.

A: No, no, no. Make the –

Q: Make what higher?

A: Higher by the plant. In Polish I know. You know, you have – you have

[**indecipherable**] yeah. You take the ho –

Q: You have to **obsypać**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: You take the ground, and cover up – put by the plant, like that.

Q: You mean – that is, you put a seed down, and you –

A: No, no –

Q: No?

A: The plant already is growing.

Q: The plant is already growing?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you put more dirt on it.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: On the sides.

Q: On the sides of the –

A: To make higher up by the plant.

Q: Okay, so why would you do that? Does it need more dirt?

A: That's the way they do.

Q: Okay.

A: And you take the – those rows are very la – very long. So each one goes in the gr-group, and you do on one side, and you do on – do on the other side, and go all the way to the end. You are done with that, then you take ano –

Q: Next row.

A: Yeah. So that's –

Q: That's what she was doing.

A: And we'd – grownups were doing, and she was doing, and then I went to change her. I said, do you stay home and I will take. And I will – when they call your name I will say that

Q: It's her.

A: – I am her. And they didn't recognize, you know –

Q: The difference.

A: – but I got – we got it –

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A2: They were very nice people

A: **Le – le pirozhki**, you – you know, that pancake with the hole –

Q: Oh yeah.

A: – that's their bread, you know. So –

Q: So you were – so you got something to eat, and you were able to rest –

A: Yeah.

Q: – because one works, the other rests, and so on.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay. And so this lady that sees – that hears your sister talking with another Pole – girl in Polish, comes by, and what does she do?

A: That –

A2: Oh, she did the same thing as we are.

Q: Wait a – hang on a se –

A: But in different –

A2: [**indecipherable**] she was a par – Polish deportee also.

Q: What did she do? What did this lady do?

A: Apparently the – the same thing, but I don't know if it was – she in different camp, or this camp, I – that I don't know.

Q: No, I don't mean what work she did, I meant, how did she affect your life?

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Oh, wouldn't be for her, we probably will be still there.

Q: Okay.

A: Because nobody knew that we are there, and she was the one to help us, to let them know that there are children without parents.

Q: Ah, I see.

A: So wouldn't be – she is very –

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: No, I didn't seen her. My sister did.

Q: Okay. And so what happened with you after that?

A: So, that one day, soldier came with the horse and buggy. Army.

Q: Mm-hm. Polish army.

A: Polish army. And took us, five of us, and took to orphanage.

Q: And the orphanage was where?

A: I don't think it's in the same – like we were on outskirts of the village. I don't know if that was more in the middle or something. That –

Q: What was the name of the village?

A: Or the –

Q: What does – the name of the orphanage was, basically is what I'm asking.

A: That I don't know, because that was small group of children.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Okay.

A: So they didn't had no names, I think.

Q: Okay.

A: And they were peep – looking for children a – us, and forming those orphanages, 10 - 20 children. And then later on in **India**, they join all children together, so we had thousand of them.

Q: Okay, so in this place, at first you're brought to an orphanage.

A: Yes.

Q: And you stay there for how long?

A: Maybe a month, month and a half or something.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then what happened?

A: And then, with the trucks, army trucks, they took us to **Krasnovodsk**.

Q: Okay.

A: I think. And then, like you – you have information about that. And then they put us on this ship. And –

Q: And your sister talked about how she had to part with the trunk for your family.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Oh, now was that – was that in **Krasnovodsk**, or then that's here, because I see that – I remember that shur – that shores, you know, that –

Q: Yeah, the – the – the shore –

A: – beach, beach.

Q: – yeah, the beach.

A: And I remember laying on that sand, and all that stuff in the sun. So that must be there when she left, because that ship, or – that wasn't big ship like, you know, normal, but they couldn't fit too many people, you know.

Q: You went together –

A: Yeah.

Q: – you and your sister?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, yeah. So, we had to leave, the only thing – I didn't take nothing, because the teacher says – the lady says, you cannot take anything, so I didn't. And what I had in that trunk, what meant to me, big pict – pict – picture – picture from my first communion, that when you receive communion, you have – and I still remember how that picture look, the big one, you know.

Q: Oh, yeah.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: And she says you cannot take anything. Somehow my sister did better, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: So anyway.

Q: It was sad, huh?

A: Yeah, oh yeah, that's – I never forgot that.

Q: Yeah. So, then you're one the boat, and your le – you're going t –

A: To **Paklevy**(ph).

Q: Did you have a fe – a good – did you have a devi – different feeling when you were leaving the **Soviet Union**?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: That we are free.

Q: Okay.

A: You free. And the people were lucky, like us, that we – they had somebody in the Polish army. Those other ones had to stay behind. Can you imagine? They – the –

Q: So not everybody who was Polish could leave?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: No, because **Stalin** gave to **Sikorski**, you know, they sign a treaty or something, that **Sikorski** ask, if you release all the people, Polish people from **Siberia**, from **Russia**, and he will form the po – army from Polish men to help you to fight Germans –

Q: Right.

A: – because they already – and then, I think we were on third transport, and then all of a sudden we left, and he says, no more. So we were the last transport that could leave.

Q: That could leave.

A: Yes.

Q: And you left when?

A: Oh, I – we left **Teshuava**(ph) January 18, 1942.

Q: And you left **Krasnovodsk** when?

A: **Krasnovodsk**? August 12, '42.

Q: Wow, so it took seven or eight months for you to get from the camp –

A: Yeah.

Q: – to **Krasnovodsk**?

A: Yeah, because – and then it took us again about month, traveling from **Siberia** to – to –

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Yeah, right.

A: – to the destination there in – to **Asia**, to **Kyrgyzstan** –

Q: To **Kyrgyzstan**, yeah.

A: – yeah.

Q: And when you got to the other side, what did you see? When you had left the **Soviet Union**, you're on the ship, you get to the other side, what's there?

A: Beach. That's all, beach.

Q: That's all.

A: And people laying in the sun. There's nothing to hide. And lot of sick, skinny, dying.

Q: Really?

A: There's – and in the book you will have some Polish children there, skin and bone, you know. And one – and they told us, don't drink water. But we were so thirsty. I think they gave us sardines and crackers, no water. And it –

Q: And that's salty, yeah.

A: Yeah, and I went as far as I could to the wa – to the la – to the sea –

Q: Edge of the water, mm-hm.

A: – sea, because that's not ocean.

Q: Yeah.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Because the – you know, they use a lot of ships going there, and they lose a lot of oil. So take waters – to cover – so I did this – and I knew that I shouldn't, and I taste it, that was it. That's so salty.

Q: Okay, okay. So you were – you were so thirsty that you were pushing away –

A: Yeah.

Q: – whatever oil spills there were –

A: Yeah.

Q: – to try and take a drink of water.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: So –

Q: What happened to you after that?

A: Oh, I – we lay there. After – after – I don't know how many days we were there, two – and that ship came, and pu – pack us in that, it was standing position, you know, very tight. And then it took – I don't know the day or – or night, to get to **Paklevya**(ph). There they took us too – again, on the sand, we had to lay. And next day they took us to – to take shower. So one door you come in, undress, take a shower, all – all – all a-adults or children all mixed up, you know. Then you go the other door, leave the other ex – use exit. And they gave me towel that – hand towel,

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

the ma – little. They should give the regular bath towel, but I – I somehow got the little one. And a little that – like for children in the summer, walk – wearing – used to –

Q: Shorts?

A: Not shorts. That's one piece, you tie on top here.

Q: Oh yeah, mm-hm.

A: You know, that used to be very popular. I got this, and that baby towel, that little towel. That's all. And in – when we were in **Teheran**, I think that was in **Teheran**, but in – and we start going to school. But school was outside, we had to build ourselves a chair to sit, from the stones, pick up the stones. And then higher up for writing. So after we did that, teacher gave us piece of paper and a pencil, and next day she says, everybody – girls, everybody comes in the dress. I came the way I am. Didn't I tell you come with the dress? And they didn't – third day, she pointed out to me, why are you're not in the dress? I start crying, because you know, because I don't have mother. And one girl said, oh, she's from orphanage. So I told my sister, she took her nightgown, my nightgown, and she made me the dress.

Q: Oh.

A: She found a needle, and –

A2: I never had [indecipherable].

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Yeah?

A: In **Poland** she was sewing for that doll she – you know.

Q: Oh yeah.

A: So she says, I know how to do it.

Q: How to make a dress?

A: And here I was so proud of that dress, from two nightgowns, one this, one that.

So that's my mother, you know.

Q: Oh.

A2: [indecipherable] that dress.

A: Yeah [inaudible]

Q: And – and so, how long did you stay there, and when did you move from there?

A: Well, I know that they took us from – wait a minute. They – from there took – we went to **Karachi**, and then fr – wait a minute. A-And then to country club, but that's in **Teheran**, you know. They call the tents underground, like army. So I think the army left for us, probably made those tents.

Q: And it was called the country club?

A: Yeah, they called it the county club. So we stayed there up to March 3rd, 1943, and then they transfer us to **Maleer(ph)**, to that – where the –

Q: In **India**.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: In **India**, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And there we were probably through September – September 8th, '43.

Q: Okay.

A: And they brought us to – back to the car – to **Karachi**, that's was port, to that port.

Q: Right.

A: And that's where they put us on a ship, **Hermitage**, and I think we cross –

Q: The **Pacific**.

A: – to **Bombay**. From there, they took us to **Bombay**. So it's that **Indian** Ocean, I think.

Q: That's right, yes, I was wrong.

A: And they were so dangerous, we had – we were guarded with lot of ships around us.

Q: Really?

A: Because they had lot of mines, Germans would mines there.

Q: Oh my goodness, so far away.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Okay.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: And then the – on the ship, when they put us in **Bombay**, transferred to American ship, then they took lot of also, wounded soldiers, taking back to **United States**.

Q: So you saw some of the wounded soldiers?

A: Ah, they – they brought us when ship was already loaded. We didn't see nothing. We didn't know that they are – later on we found out about 5,000 shol – soldiers, but we didn't know. They kept us on the end of the ship.

Q: I see.

A: And –

Q: And then you – you – and then they took you to where?

A: To **Los Angeles**, for – I think that's a army camp there. And they have, when you open – look at – through the window, you saw how – **Hollywood** –

Q: **Hollywood**.

A: – on the mountains. That's a – we were right there. And –

Q: Were you allowed off the ship?

A: They brought us, you know, with guards –

Q: Okay.

A: – you know, on this, because we couldn't get lost. They had to keep us, you know.

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Okay.

A: And we were, I think, for quarantine, for a week or something. They check us –

Q: Okay.

A: – the doctors, you know, we got doctors there. And then, they tried to keep us in **United States**, but they said that president doesn't want – it's during the – we were in the war already. So nobody could come to this – they wouldn't accept anybody –

Q: Okay

A: – to the – to come to country – this – to **United States** at that time.

Q: So where did you go?

A: To **Mexico**.

Q: Okay.

A: **Santa Rosa**.

Q: Okay. And was your sister with you the whole time?

A: She was with different – with her class.

Q: Okay.

A: We were by classes, so she was a year higher – or two.

Q: In – in a different – in the same ship?

A: The same everything.

Q: Okay.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: And a train, I think different – I don't think we were together. Oh, maybe we were together, because we had passport together, and one passport for two.

Q: Okay.

A: And when we came through to [indecipherable] they were checking us.

Q: So you were driving through the **United States** to go to **Santa Rosa**. You didn't go by ship to **Santa Rosa**?

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: A – a train.

Q: A train?

A: They put us on the train, and then took us. I don't know if that was Mexican, maybe, train, or our train can go. I don't know –

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: – which one was at that time.

Q: And then – then you ended up in **Santa Rosa, Mexico**. Is **Santa Rosa** the name of a town?

A: A camp.

Q: A camp. What's –

A: I think maybe that's a village around, maybe was the – but –

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A2: No.

A: No?

Q: What ni – what – what city was it close to in **Mexico**?

A: **León**.

Q: Excuse me?

A: **León**.

Q: **León, Mexico**?

A: Guanda – guada – **Guanajuato** state.

Q: **Guanajuato** state, okay.

A: So that's in middle of the **Mexico**, kind of.

Q: Okay.

A: And maybe seven kilometers or something to – to the city.

Q: Mm-hm, let's cut.

A: You can – **[break]**

Q: All right. So – so it was in the middle of **Mexico**, and you went to school.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: We made two school years in one year.

Q: Wow.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Because we lost all those years.

Q: Yes.

A: So, you know – even we went to, in **Russia**, but we didn't learn much, you know. How to write –

Q: Yes.

A: – and math, you know, a little bit, you know, but –

Q: And – and by the time you got to **Mexico** you're already 13 years old?

A: Yes.

Q: All right. And you go to school for the next three years?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And what happens then?

A: Then, after war and that, then I think from **Poland** that the communistic government was – so – was sending delegation to take us back to **Poland**.

Q: Oh really? All the way to **Mexico**?

A: Yeah. And when they found out that, so day and night they were preparing the visas for us, because already they kind of found out wh-where we will be going, you know, like that one priest from Saint **He-Hedwig's**(ph) orphanage took 105, I think –

Q: To **Poland**?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: To **United States**.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: And then other in **Philadelphia**, I think, s-some orphanages took some children.

So they spread all the children from **Mexico**, you know.

Q: And this time you were allowed into the **United States**?

A: Yeah. And that was already '46.

Q: Okay.

A: And – wait a minute. Wait, what I – what I want to say? Oh yeah, so when the delegation came, they found empty rooms, because if they would take us back to **Poland**, who knows, they might send us back to **Russia**.

Q: Everybody was afraid.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

A: So – and our father and brother couldn't go to **Poland** because they would get them back, you know. So –

Q: So you – did you know at this time, when you were in **Mexico**, where your father was, where your brother was?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Yeah, in – when we were in **India** that's in a – that's not – was that in **Maleer**(ph)? I don't know – when we were in **India**, that's when we found out where he is, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: He was looking in newspaper.

Q: Your father was?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that lady, my sister's lady that took care of her class.

Q: Right.

A: She fou – noticed that – found out in a newspaper –

Q: Okay.

A: – the name of our father.

Q: Okay.

A: So –

Q: And at some point you finish your studies, yes, your high school studies?

A: No, I had two more years to go.

Q: Okay. And where did you finish those?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Holy Family Academy in **Chicago**. That was nazer – nuns of **Nazareth**. Holy Family of **Nazareth**.

Q: Okay.

A: They – they ran this school.

Q: Okay.

A: And when we – they brought us to mexi – to – here to orphanage, actually I was just three months in orphanage.

Q: What happened then?

A: I end up in a convent.

Q: Did you join the convent?

A: I never dream, I never plan, but I think one time they took us to **Rivervi-view**, you know, for treat from orphanage, and lot of – I think wa – one girl from my class, she met the nun, and apparently she talked to her, and she says that she wants to go to join them. So one time I was coming from dorm out, she was going in. She says, I want to say goodbye to you, I am leaving for convent. I said, ask my Mother Superior if she would take me. I said that, and I forgot that I ever said this. Two weeks later, two sisters came, called me to the office there, que – a few questions and they took me. Then I had to run and look for my sister to tell her I am going to convent. Poor sister.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: Yeah.

A: She was shock, so she cry and things like that. So what I had, few pennies, I gave it to you – to her. But that's how – wouldn't be for something like that, we probably never will part.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: Yeah.

Q: So did you actually zi – start taking, you know, your orders to become a nun?

A: I was too young, so for two years they kept us in school. There was six Polish from orphanage, and six American girls. So we slept in one room in school, and so I graduated from high school, and then I went to novitiate. So I was two years there, in novitiate, and then one year I make the vows. For one year you do, for six years. And after one year my health was going really down, you know, I lost lot of weight and my blood was going down, down. The doctor didn't know what to do. And something – something was telling me you have to leave. So I told the Mothers Provincial that I would like to leave – and because next day they would renew the vows. Now that I wanted to leave, I left in the evening, without any get permission, nothing, because you make vows for one year. And every year you renew, if you want to stay. And when you s – after six years, if you would make the vows, the last one, then if you want to leave, you have to get from Pope –

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

Q: I see.

A: – permission. So I didn't had to – I call my sister and – and she told my dad – he already came to this country. They came in the evening, pick me up, and that's all.

Q: Had you already seen your dad?

A: Yeah, not before. Wait, when he came first time, a year before – well, maybe not even that, then they came –

A2: Three months earlier.

Q: Yeah, three months earlier.

A: So they came to visit me. I was working at that time in hospital. So –

Q: And then after that, how did your life develop, how did your life unfold?

A: I stay with my sister, she was married for two years, I think. For two weeks she took care of me, make me breakfast, told me to sleep, because I lost a lot of weight. Build me up fo – after two weeks her husband went with me and – to look for a job. I got the job, and I still lived. Then I met my husband, and that's the way.

Q: And when did you get married?

A: July 11th, 1955.

Q: And your husband's name?

A: **Bernard Sobczak.**

Q: Okay. Do you have children?

Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Four.

Q: What are their names?

A: **Kristy**(ph), **Don**, **Sue** and **Michael**.

Q: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add to what we've talked about today, that you think is important for people to know about your experience?

A: Oh, the only thing, you have to believe in God. Pray, believe and what else – believe? I think there's one more thing, I think – and everything will turn out okay. But without faith, have faith. If you don't have faith – we always thought that we will find our mo – parents, and – but that was carrying us through. And pray, and – oh, and cry. We cry. One cry, the other starts. This one stop, the other s – and so our pillow was always wet in the night, you know, we cry in the night. People didn't know that we are crying, you know. But that's what the – crying, praying and faith, that's all.

Q: That's what kept you going.

A: Yes. And faith when – anytime in the life you have hardship, that's what faith helps you through, you know. So – but help. God plan everything. I never planned to go to convent, I was very happy there. They were very good to me. They didn't want me to leave, you know, but that's –

Q: Well, you had a voice inside.

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Interview with Irene Sobczak
January 28, 2015

A: Yeah. And my husband was writing to one girl that he met before he came to **United States** because he was born in **United States**, but caught by war. So he was a citizen. And he was writing for six years, and then he stopped, and – and I got out of the convent, and that's it. And through my sister I met him because we were going to downtown for swimming suit, and we came off from the bus, we were crossing the street to pick up the subway, and in the middle – he was coming from the other side. So we met each – in the middle, so we walk back to the edge with him. My sister says, **Bernie**, meet my sister **Irene**. **Irene** meet my friend **Bernie**.

Q: And there it was.

A: Three months later we met by ourselves. But that was the middle of the street, the – if I would then meet at that time, probably I wouldn't meet him, because you know, I wouldn't accept – if he would ask me to dance, maybe I wouldn't accept. But he was good-looking.

Q: Wonderful things can happen.

A: Yeah, it is –

Q: Yeah.

A: – bad childhood, but later on I was lucky to have happy, you know, life. So – and 56 years together we live. So that's a –

Q: That's a –

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A: – blessing, yeah.

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yes.

A: So anyway –

Q: So thank you.

A: You're welcome. I –

Q: Thank you so much for sharing what you have told us today, sharing your life, talking about your sister and your mother and the people, other people who were important to you, and how you all went through –

A: Yeah.

Q: – these very trying times. So with that, I'm going to say this concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** interview with **Irena Synowiec Sobczak** –

A: Yes.

Q: – on June two – on June – on January 28th, 2015.

A: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Q: You're welcome, you're welcome.

Conclusion of Interview

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