Yeah. A little bit.
OK. We're rolling.
This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Hannah Kushynski on August 23, 2016 in Los Angeles, California. Thank you, again, for agreeing to interview with us today. We very much appreciate it.
Like we talked about before, we'll start at the very beginning with your birthday
Yeah.
your name at birth, and then we'll move on from there.
OK.
So could you please give us your date of birth?
December 22, 1924.
And where were you born?
Czestochowa, Poland.
And was your name different when you were born? Did you have a different name when you were born?
No. And just the first name, they call me Janka.
Janka. OK.
Yeah. That's the Polish name, Janka instead of Hannah.
And what was your maiden name?
[INAUDIBLE]
[INAUDIBLE] OK. Did you have any nicknames growing up?
No.
Always Janka?
Yeah.
Always Janka. Were your parents born in Poland as well?
In Poland also. Yeah.
And where in Poland?
I don't know.
That's OK. So were you born, and did you grow up in the same village?

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https://collections.ushmm.org Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection Yeah. OK. What were your parents' names? My mother's maiden name was Greenbaum. And my father was [INAUDIBLE]. And what were their first names? My mother's name was Freida. And my father's name was Abram. Do you know how they met? No. What were they like? Oh, nice, ordinary people. Nothing. My father was a sportsman. He was driving motorcycles and skiing. He was very much involved with skiing. Used to go every year. I think was 1935, was, how we call it, Olympics in Zakopane in Poland. So my father went there. He was [INAUDIBLE]. So the mother was playing house housewife. She work with my father in the store. We have a store. From a bicycles and motorcycles and parts. We have a nice store. And that where mother and my father work do it. So when you were talking about the Olympics, did your father go to watch the skiing, or did he compete? When your father went to the Olympics in Poland--Yeah. --did he compete? Did he actually ski? Skiing.

So he was part of the Olympics.

Yeah.

He was an athlete.

Oh, wow. Wow. And did he ever talk about-- did he ever talk about the Olympics or just that he had been?

No.

And so your mother was a housewife?

Yes.

But she also worked at the store?

Yeah.

OK. Did your grandparents also live in town?

My grandma used to live with us, my mother's mother. And my grandfather was not alive anymore.

What about your father's parents?

don't know. He wasn't alive when I was born.
Did any aunts or uncles live in town?
Yes. My mother have 11 kids.
She was one of 11?
My mother's mother have 11 kids
Wow.
-all over the world. Even in United States was one brother and different cities in Poland. But mostly, they it were in Czestochowa.
Did your dad have any brothers or sisters?
No. I don't know.
So he was an only child?
was a child and my mother have late. I was a big girl at that time. She have a little boy. But he went with a you know, there was aktion. They selected people left and right. So he went with grandma and my mother. And I stay with my father.
My father was with me in [NON-ENGLISH] and the camp. Til the last day on the last day was a dirt road. He went on t. Nothing.
So let's go back a little bit. So you had one brother?
Yeah.
What was his name?
Alex.
Alex. Alex. And you were you were a lot older than he was? You were a lot older than he was?
Alex. And you were you were a lot older than he was? You were a lot older than he was?
Alex. And you were you were a lot older than he was? You were a lot older than he was? Yeah.
Alex. And you were you were a lot older than he was? You were a lot older than he was? Yeah. How many years?
Alex. And you were you were a lot older than he was? You were a lot older than he was? Yeah. How many years? He was five years old, and I was already like 10, 11. Was a big different. But I suppose it was a accident. I don't know.
Alex. And you were you were a lot older than he was? You were a lot older than he was? Yeah. How many years? He was five years old, and I was already like 10, 11. Was a big different. But I suppose it was a accident. I don't know. What languages did you speak? What languages did you speak?
Alex. And you were you were a lot older than he was? You were a lot older than he was? Yeah. How many years? He was five years old, and I was already like 10, 11. Was a big different. But I suppose it was a accident. I don't know. What languages did you speak? What languages did you speak? The city?
Alex. And you were you were a lot older than he was? You were a lot older than he was? Yeah. How many years? He was five years old, and I was already like 10, 11. Was a big different. But I suppose it was a accident. I don't know. What languages did you speak? What languages did you speak? The city? What languages?



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big house. I tell you, my grandma used to make wine for holidays and put it in my room. Was safe to keep. But wasn't

Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection my room. And when she made the wine, was dripping, you know, cleaning. And sneak a taste every once in a while? Yes. Was no more same. Did she find out about that? Yes, she find out. Yeah. And I was that time, I don't know, maybe 10 years old. I remember grandma was a very mad on me. But took it out and took it in her room. So it sounds like your family was very close--Yeah. --with your grandma living there and your--Oh, yeah. --friends and--And aunt used to come. Holidays, and even not holidays, we come for dinner or so. Yeah, we're very close. Did your family ever talk about life in-between the First World War and the Second World War? What they have? Did they ever talk about the interwar period? I don't know. I don't--Do you remember them ever talking about politics at home or events in Germany, anything like that? Never. So if they did, they weren't talking in front of you or your--Yeah. About family, about business, but not politics. So what was the town like that you grew up in? Was it big, small? A big house, big house. My grandma had a room. And my had a room. Was like maybe three bedrooms. Was a nice place. And the building had stores. And we were on the first floor. And under that was stores. And one of the stores was [INAUDIBLE] first store in the same building with this business. Oh. So he worked right underneath the apartment. And downstairs. Upstairs, we live. And downstairs, we had a business.

And so how big was the town you lived in? Were there are a lot of people living in the town, or was it small?

that, but in a separate apartment, but in the same building.

Just us, just my family. That's all. But it was like an apartment house, not the other people who used to live, not with

Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection But what about the town that you lived in, the city that you grew up in? The town-- your hometown. Was one-- just one place where we live. I guess what I'm trying to ask is, how big was the town that you lived in, the town of-How many apartments? Well, the entire city that you grew up in. Oh. Yeah. How big was that? I believe that was 30,000 Jewish families. Just Jews, 30,000? Jewish families. Was a big, big city. Wasn't a little place. Was Jewish people were there, around 30,000. How many non-Jewish people? Do you know? I don't remember. OK. Do you remember the interactions between Jews and non-Jews in the town? The Polish was very antisemitic. Very. Mine husband, many years ago, he was in UCLA give a statement like now. And he talk about it very much. I have the speech-- the copy. The tape. Yeah, the tape. But if you want to see it, I can give it later. Do you remember the antisemitism? Me, myself? Yeah. Do you remember experiencing that or seeing anything like that? No. No. So your husband saw a lot of that, but you did not? Yeah, I was that time, 10 years, what I have Polish Catholic people, friends, what could go black. And friends, I didn't-by us, we never talk about antisemitism. But in city, was very bad. But as kids, you weren't really--

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--you weren't really seeing that. Do you have any other memories of the town, about what it was like back then or

No.

maybe--

My aunt, my uncles, what live in city, yes, I did have. But not later, I don't know, later. I was just me and my father. That what we were left because in the end, now uncle all gone. They didn't live with us but in the city. Were there a lot of Jewish-owned shops? There are. So your father owned his own shop. What other kinds of-The shop-- the shop, it's a store, a business. Yeah. This he belong to him. What other stores were owned by Jews in town? I don't understand. How many other store? Yeah. That were owned by Jews. Was there a Jewish butcher? No. On our street, didn't have this. Food, we have lot of business like leather. Somebody have to sell different things, but not food. But some of these other shops were owned by Jews also? Yeah. Did your family have a radio? Yeah. Do you remember listening to it a lot? There was one [INAUDIBLE] on the first radio, what have the lights. I don't know if you know about it, a box, when what station was what city, was a [? blight. ?] Very beautiful. So did your family listen to the radio a lot? Yeah. What kinds of programs would you listen to? Did you listen to the news or--[BOTH TALKING] news and all kind of music, yeah, speeches, well you know, regular radio, and that things. But we didn't have television that time. What kind of speeches? Do you remember any specific ones? No. Let's see. So you said you had Jewish and Catholic friends? Yeah. What did you do for fun?

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I took care.

Did you play games outside?

Oh. One thing, what I was playing together, as I used to ice skate. And around, we had lot of people, friends, what we were going together. Was Polish, Catholics, all kinds, all kinds of people. I was very good skater. And my mother make for me a beautiful dress for skating. Blue satin with white fur.

for the a beautiful cress for skating. Blue satin with white fur.
They call me Sonja Henie. I don't know if you remember that here in United States. She was one of the best skaters. You remember? You remember Sonja Henie? [INAUDIBLE].
So you were very, very good?
Yeah. And
I used to go with my father skiing and was pretty active in sports.
So that was your favorite thing to do was sports?
Now it a favorite place, my buggy the how we call it I cannot remember. The walker. Now it only thing I can have. I cannot walk on myself. Have to have a walker.
But back then, sports were your favorite?
Yeah.
Yeah?
Yeah.
Did you play any instruments or
I used to play piano.
Oh, really. When did you learn?
Poland.
And how old were you when you learned how?
Oh, maybe I start young, maybe 8. And I was playing till the war. At that time, they took away the furniture, everything. They took the piano, and I didn't play anymore. And I have a piano for my daughter. I want her to know But beginning, she took it. But now, the same thing. She give it up.
Do you ever play anymore?
What?
Do you ever play the piano anymore?
I don't I don't play now. I had it for my kids. My great great kids are coming here. They "bumber-hum." But is OK Someday, they will be one of them would take it home.

So how long had your father owned the bicycle and motorcycle shop?

https://collections.ushmm.org Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection How long? Probably from the time when they got married because it's like I remember, all the time he had a shop. Did he spend a lot of time at the shop? Yeah. Regular business, selling. When did you start school? When did you start going to school? When I was kid, from kindergarten was always in school. So five or six years old? Yeah. Was your school a public school? No. Beginning, was a kindergarten what was for everybody. Was later when I start gymnasium. I went to a Jewish. Was at What they call it. So it was a private Jewish gymnasium? And it was here that you started learning English? Yeah. This was second in language. In school, we talk all Polish. Were girls and boys at the same school? Yeah. Did you have a lot of Jewish classmates? Yeah. Were you treated differently from the non-Jewish students? I don't remember. I don't think so. Was just Jewish. What were the classrooms like? Did you each have your own desk, or did you share desks? What did the classrooms look like? Classroom? Mm-hmm. Was big classroom where we have a lot of kids. I don't remember how much, but was lot. So a lot of desks and everyone in one big room? Yeah. So you were learning English. This was one hour. In-between the classes, was one hour maybe three times a week. That's all. But not a big-- a little bit. Whoever wanted took it. But for, there was a choice or German or English. And I took English.

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What other subjects did you learn?

No other. What other classes? Did you also take math and history? What was--[INAUDIBLE] our school teaching-- mathematics and history and - don't -- normal school. Did you have to take a religion class? I don't think so. Did you have a favorite subject? Not especially. Did you have any favorite teachers or maybe some memorable ones? No. No favorites? Just kind of-- they came in they left. Let's see. What else. So you said your husband remembers a lot of antisemitism, but you don't remember seeing any before the war? No. We know, before the war, the antisemitism was very big. You are afraid to go in the street. In front of our store, when my parents had-- that they was picketing. They put two, three people. And they were walking with a sign-- don't buy by Jews. This is a crime, let's say that. In Polish, they have [NON-ENGLISH]. Just very bad. And the same, not only in front of our store and front of other stores, they were going around and screaming, don't buy by Jews. Don't-- very bad, very bad. That didn't -- you are in a little bit older, you are not sure to go in the evening. And by yourself, can be dead. And the same thing. They burn a temple. Yeah. And this was before the war. That was before the war, yes. Shortly before the war start. What did you and your family think when you saw these people picketing outside the store? They can -- they cannot help nothing. It was allowed to walk in the street, and you cannot people to go away from here because they have the right to be on the street the same just like anybody else. Was it scary? Much scared. Very scared. Was not safe to go in the evening. How long did the picketing last? Till the war-- we were in the war.

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So they just kept coming back day after day. Do you have any other memories from before the war started like that? Or

I had a cousin. And I used to have my aunt, my father's sister, in Israel. They left Poland before the war. So that's the only one what I had. She have a son and a daughter. But they're all gone today. No more. I'm from United States. I used

other memories?

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Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection to go every three years to Israel to visit them. But now they gone. [INAUDIBLE].

When did they leave for Israel?

They left Israel in I think, in 1935. I was a little girl. But I remember.

Why Israel?

Why Israel? Because the doctors-- mine cousin was sick. And then the doctor recommended the best place to live in, in the one country. So we don't have anybody. And everybody at that time was going to Israel. And they were young. They have two little kids. They left for Israel. But that's the reason they became alive because they weren't in Poland. So that's the only one.

The only ones who left before the war started? They were the only ones who left before the war started?

Yes.

Did you know anybody else who left before the war?

No. Oh, yeah, my uncle, my mother's half-brother left to come to United States. But grandma wasn't in touch with them. I did know. I was a kid.

Yeah. But sometime before the war--

Yeah.

--he went--

Yeah.

--to the US.

Yeah.

Did he go to New York or--

No they live here.

Oh. He came to California.

In Los Angeles.

Oh, wow.

After the war, I was trying to contact him. But I couldn't.

Mm-hmm.

Bad experience. My husband had a-- he used to work making ladies' handbags. And I was help make handbags. And I decide that I take few sample and go sell it to the stores. And I went to one place, what was a man. And he bought from me some bags. And I asked him, what is his name? So he told me, Joe Green. And I told him, I just didn't think nothing until I come home. He cancel the order of the handbags. Was suspicious.

And I talk to somebody. What was the name from the owner from this story originally? They told me the name was Joe

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Greenbaum. He was the brother of my mother. He didn't want to have nothing to do with me. And he cancel. He cancel the order. I saw him. Because I called him, and I told them, you are my uncle. I don't want anything from you. I just wanted a family because I didn't have any family.

But he was afraid to be a family with me because when my father and my uncle, before the war, they came to the United States and bought some stock. And he knew about it. He collected. And he didn't want any business with me. That's how it is. Very sad.

But I was very concerned to have a family. And I saw him. And he at in court. He said that he have nothing to do with me. But was through the lawyer find out that his name originally was John Greenbaum, what my mother brother. Very sad.

So Miss Kushynski, let's go back a little bit.

What?

Let's start with the start of the war, in September.

In 1939, the German came to Poland. In especially the first of the year to Czestochowa because Czestochowa was close to German border. So we were the first people to be hurt by them. First of all. The first thing what they did, they came to Czestochowa. They took thing from people like jewelry.

They confiscated.

Yeah.

They caught you. That's right. And people have to deliver themself. They put signs that jewelry and all of the painting to put [INAUDIBLE] in. And the peoples have to have in the same time, they were in different cities. And they put the people more together. And they made a ghetto in Poland. The people—in lot of people from other cities come to our cities in the — you have to share their apartment with people what didn't have place to stay.

So as long we have big apartment, we have people what came to stay with us like we just can have just one bedroom, not three because we have to give away the apartment. And they put a [NON-ENGLISH], what is a manager for the business in whatever it was. We have to give away to the-- like we sell something, the money have to go to German.

Let's jump back a little bit to when the war first started. Do you remember learning that the Germans had invaded?

I don't understand.

Do you remember when you heard about the Germans invading Poland?

Not remember. I see them. Right away was a commission to share the apartment for the other people, what came from Lodz came from little places. Everybody came to Czestochowa.

But how did you know that the war had started? Did you hear it on the radio or in the newspaper?

We had seen the soldiers marching.

They marched through town.

On the streets. You see it. You are forbidden to be in the evening on the street. You have a business, late, too late, have opened the store. Was some regulations. We had to pay him.

So on September 1, when they came into Poland--



So one family was standing to go, The German select two people on this side and two people on that side. So I went with my father. And my brother went with my mother and my grandma. And I never have seen again. And we never came back to the apartment.

back to our apartment. So the took the families together, and they make to go to the left, to go to the right. So people

what they can lose. I grow up. I was big girl. I didn't look like 12-year-olds kid. I look like 16 at least.

Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection They took us to a big hall. And we stayed there for a few days. And they did a [? great-- ?] what was it? Was a ghetto. And everybody had what they have got. And all what was men separate and women separate.

And this was after the selection?

What?

This was after the selection that you were taken to this new place?

Yeah.

How many people to a room at this new place?

Oh, is a lot of people. Everybody had a place to stay. That's all. Was a lot of people.

Did you know anybody there?

What?

Did you know any of the women there?

[? I ?] was some friends. But what one neighbor, what used to live before, near us, well, you know, other people. They took-- I cannot-- and then we-- the store in the house, and we called my father's friend, so-called friend, Polack, and told him to come with the horse and buggy and take it for himself.

He told him then, if I am alive and my father is alive to keep it for us. So the same thing. We told him to go upstairs to the room and take whatever they can to have it. And we didn't have nothing. We just came with package-- suitcase, and that's all. And then a big one, maybe so big like-- backpack, that's it. Everybody went out with the [INAUDIBLE].

And before you left, before you left, what-- did you have enough food to eat? Was there rationing of food?

Oh. I don't understand your question.

Was there enough to eat? Was there enough food and water before you went to this place?

Yeah. They give water and some going around. Give it something. Not big.

So you could only get so much flour at a time or things like that.

Not much. Not much. When we got all people, what went on one side, went to the hall. And the other people, the other half went to Treblinka. [INAUDIBLE]. [? And I?] don't have [INAUDIBLE].

Do you remember what you packed in your suitcase?

What?

Do you remember what you packed in your suitcase to leave with?

Yes. What we could take it. My [INAUDIBLE]. Nothing. Our camp didn't have specially [INAUDIBLE] for us. We have our own. And they didn't put numbers. We didn't have numbers. And took few days, and they got us all together, men [INAUDIBLE] and count us.

And every morning, we have to come to a place in the-- see that everybody is here. And we have to start to work. There were places where they divide people to different kind of work. In the first, I have a place where they make-- how we

Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection call it-- bullets for the German who have little bullets. We have to segregate them, what are good. What are no good and give it back to the German. That was like in garage and where they are all day.

We have an hour to go to the kitchen one after another. And we got some bread and soup. We went back to the hall where we were there. And after that, we were transferred to a barrack. And from there, that's our life, to go in the barrack, to sleep there. And the morning, go to the factory.

And later, I was working there, maybe few weeks. And they change my work. And I went to the 'nother place. I went direct to the factory. Was a huge factory. And over there, we used to make bullets.

From so much, I was a controller for 18 machines. The machine was working on a salt water with chemicals. I have to control, walk back and forth and in water. I came out from the camp, I have holes what eat up the--

There was some kind of chemical.

I don't can find the expression. I was working in the water of with the chemicals. And in the end of the day, my hose were beginning to -- I came out.

So they were--

Very bad. I had bandage. I have to take it out because I can't walk and control the machine with the bandage. So on the bandage fall apart. And that was for a long time. My husband was that time friend of mine. He find out that I am in that new factory what they do this. He had-- how would they call it-- connection with some gentleman. And I one day, he took me out from there to a different place in what they have the dry work, not in the saltwater.

And I was in the other place. All of a sudden they called me from the German, the meister, the manager. And I went out from that. He grabbed my blouse and throw me on the floor and kick my-- he didn't want me to go to that place. I suppose to go back to the bullets, what I used to make, the 18 machines.

I was so bad kicked, that I start to laugh-- hysterical laugh. And he kicked me. What I laugh, , he kicked me more. And [? then ?] he told me to go back to the place where I used to work. No. No, no, factory.

And the people brought water in bucket with butter to-- for me to come back to life because I was halfway dead.

So this was a guard that didn't want you to leave?

What?

This was a guard who did not want you to leave? He wanted you to stay-- Yeah.

--with the chemicals on the floor.

Yeah. Yeah. I couldn't go. He grabbed me for the blouse. He throw me on the floor and kick me the hot water maybe half an hour. My friend came with water and pour on me that I will Come back to life. And that's how I have to come back and be making the machine when they make the bullets.

They called [NON-ENGLISH], the bullets, the machine, what make the bullets called [NON-ENGLISH].

[NON-ENGLISH]?

What they are spreading-- spread it out from a small bullet to big bullet. That was my job.

What was the name of the company?

HASAG.

HASAG. It was a German company? So when you said your first job was looking at-- you were sorting bullets, the different kinds of bullets when you first started?

When I first started, I was in the barrack where you select therm.

So you pick--

Was dry. They call my friend was the manager. He ask for me. He ask few people what he wanted to stay in the [INAUDIBLE]. So that's how it was. But did they transferred me to that bullets.

But in this first job, were you picking out the bad bullets?

Yeah.

So you were sorting them, the good ones and the bad ones.

Yeah.

And then you moved--

Yeah.

--to the job where you were actually making them?

Yeah. One time, I was late when was the gather when they count the people. I was late. And I was punish. I went to the office. I had to register as I am late. And those people who were late, they were beaten with a belt. And all of a sudden, my friend came there. And he know the gentleman, what he's doing it. He told him that my friend is here, and he [INAUDIBLE] on me not to be beaten.

And they call me to the office. I have to stay and see how they doing to somebody else. That was so painful. But was better than I should get myself the beating. So I wasn't beaten, but I have to see this. They was terrible. He let me go later to my work, to that place.

Did other girls working with you also have to stand in the chemicals?

Yeah. I have few girls. They were girls, the friends of mine. They were in-- how you call it-- they were working on the machine. And I was walking and checking the machine, what doesn't make any straps or they're coming out good from the machine. But they were working on the machines.

And you were all standing in the chemicals while you were overseeing the process?

Yeah.

What were the barracks like where you had to sleep? Did you have bunks or--

Yeah. The top manager was German. He used to come every hour to see how I control the machines. But I had to watch good. And the bullets should come out good. And later, they take the bullets and fill it up in another part of the factory.

And this German would come in every hour to check on you?

Yeah. And the man, the top meister.

Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection What about the barracks where you slept? What was that building like?

How the building? It was many machines, different machine with heavy belts. Each machine, another one, was working on belts, leather belts. And my husband, that time was my boyfriend, he was working on the leather machines. But the

leather belts, sometimes they cracked. So they give him to fix the belts.

So your husband was working in the same place?

Yeah, in a different place. In the same building--

But just in a different part of it.

Different place, yeah.

And had you known him before the war started?

What?

Did you know him before the war started?

Yeah. He was a cousin of my friend from school. So when I used to come to my girlfriend, I know him. I knew him that time. But we weren't friends. In HASAG, we became closer friends.

Was it nice having a good friend like that?

What?

While you were at HASAG, was it nice having a good friend like that?

No, you cannot-- you were separate. Men separate and women separate. Woman have-- in that book, what you had seen-

Yes.

It's the-- how we call it-- the barracks have the wiring. Around the barracks was-- each barrack was around with the wires. Bad.

And the men and women were separate?

Yeah.

What was it like inside the barracks?

Was shelves, what we would sleeping. So they give us like from straw, you mattresses. And everybody have place. So that's all what we have. I remember one time, I got from somebody that they are-- and I have an old blouse, what was made from yarn. And I took it apart. And I want to make for myself a different blouse. Oh, this blouse, I made. I was very handy.

And in the night, I didn't sleep. And I have a little electric lamp under the pillow because was no light. And I decide that I would crochet. And just happened that the meister, the German, what was checking barracks had seen me. He called me. And he said, you make for me from the yarn I wanted sweater. And I had to make it. He was very nice to me. And I make him a sweater. So that time, he didn't said nothing. He just passed by, didn't see the light. But I made it sweater.

So instead of reporting you, he said--

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Yeah.
make me a sweater instead.
Yeah. That had nothing to do with the work, what I was working. This was an extra work.
How did you get the flashlight?
I had that.
Oh, you brought it with you?
I don't remember how I had it. I don't, really. But I had that flashlight.
How many women were in your barrack?
How many? Maybe 20. Was upstairs and downstairs. And my future sister-in-law was with me. Was my friend from before the war. In Czestochowa, she live on the same street what we live. But when we got together, so we were sticking together. And she was next lane to me in the barrack.
And she had friend. A man was coming to her. What he was a friend of her brother. But we were close. And after we got liberated, she got married to him, and I got married to my husband. I have here a picture from my husband. My husband died three years ago. We were 70 years married.
I have here a picture. Was I belong to a club here, 39 club And every year, we made that work. And I have-[INAUDIBLE]. Miriam. Give me come on here. Can she come?
Sure.
Wanna stop for a minute. Give
So we've been talking about the HASAG camp?
Yeah.
When did you first arrive there?
What?
When did you first arrive there? Do you remember the year?
Probably 1939.
And you were there for the next six years then. Did you have any other jobs?
No.
So you stuck with the supervising job.
That was my job.
So you said you got to wear street clothes? There were no uniforms?

No. Street clothes, yeah.

So it was whatever you brought with you.

Yeah. Whatever I--

Did you ever have to wear an armband or a badge of some kind?

No. Nothing. Just plain.

But there was no kind of badge to identify that--

No. We didn't have nothing.

During your time there, did you hear about anything else going on in Poland? Other ghettos or deportations?

I have no place to go. Everything was destroyed.

So you had no news of what was going on outside?

Yes.

Do you have any other memories of your time in the labor camp?

What I have?

Do you have any other memories of your time in the labor camp?

No. After we got liberated, that was the 17-- the night of 16, or 17. And we got liberated in 1945. And when I work, before liberation, my husband prepare a garage what was for horses that we maybe will go away-- run away. And he tried to get me from the working place to his place. And from there, we should go to the garage where they had the horses.

And he went, offer my father to go with us. But my father said that he wants to go before with the train because we will already know where to go when he is there. He was planning that with the train the German will take him whenever they go and we will come later. But not happen like that.

They start the train to Buchenwald. And later, they had walk a lot. And somebody what survive told me that my father got killed in that walk for-- how we call it. I don't remember.

The death march?

The death march. That they killed him that time. And we got liberated like the Russian came into the town. And we were keeping together, my sister-in-law, and my brother-in-law was with it, my stepmother, and me. We were keeping together, and we were hiding in that barrack till the morning.

And in the morning, we got lost [INAUDIBLE]. And I was walking with a whole group of people. And my nanny have to see me. She was in the waiting with the people watching who's coming. And she gave me my father's picture, my mother's picture, this picture. It's my brother when he was little. She had the picture, and she give it to me. It's the only picture of him I have. But he was bigger when he went through the march.

And so through all these years, your father was also in the HASAG--

My father was working in the same place, the HASAG together in a different part of HASAG but on HASAG. And I

Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection could see him once in a while. He could come to me. And I was with ladies, and he was with men. But we had seen each other for quite [INAUDIBLE].

What were these visits like, seeing your father after--

Normal, normal get together, hugging and kiss. And I was happy that he was with me. It's said. But was one bad thing that one day before the liberations he went on that march. He will be today-- he was born in 1900. He would be today 106 years old.

My father was a wonderful guy. Before the war, we have a group of kids. They always ask, your father will be there? Your father will be there? He danced with them. He'd give them cigarettes. [INAUDIBLE] father will be [? there. ?] Yeah. But when we walked out from HASAG, my nanny came out. It was really very sad.

So you said your husband, but your boyfriend at the time, was planning an escape.

Yeah.

Do you know the details? How were you going to--

He was working by the belts you know, the leather belts for the machines till the liberation. We got liberated together.

But you mentioned he was planning an escape. He was hiding in the stable?

Yeah.

He was with me.

So he was going to try to escape?

Yeah.

What was the plan? How was he going to try to escape?

He had a friend, what was a painter. And people, what are sick, were put in the side. And he went to his friend and told him to make me a band with red cross, that he is helping the sick people. And he got to me. And I was other part of HASAG, of the factory.

And I have to go with him. I had to jump. Was a place like a washroom on this first floor in HASAG. I have to jump from there. And I said, I am not jumping first floor. He said, come on. I catch you. And he caught me. I had to go. And we were waiting when the soldiers parked. And that was where the train was standing. So we went onto the train. And we went to the garage, where the last of the family was. That's how he got me.

So he disguised himself as a Red Cross person and--

Yeah.

So the Red Cross came into the camp sometimes?

Yes.

That's how he was--

Sure.

https://collections.ushmm.org Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection And I guess, how often did the Red Cross come in?

No. He had to take it off because he wasn't in the Red Cross. But to get to me, he have to wear the--

[BOTH TALKING]

Yeah. So later, he took it off. We were staying till the night in the garage.

But how often did the real Red Cross come to the labor camp?

How often what?

How often did the real Red Cross come to the labor camp?

I don't understand.

So you said the Red Cross--

Yeah.

--came into the-- how often did they come?

They just came that time when we have to go on the train.

Oh. It was just the one time.

One time.

Oh, I see. I see. And your husband saw them and immediately made--

Yeah.

Oh. I see. I see.

My husband was very smart. Really. I was married 70 years.

70?

Yeah. Before we left Poland, I went to say goodbye to my stepmother. So she said, you are not going anyplace before I see you married. She arranged the whole wedding for me in one day. Friday, she called people. I didn't have a wedding dress, not even-- not the right clothes. But she arranged that I get from my friend a dress. And she arranged the rabbi should come. And we got married. And after that, we left Poland.

We smuggled through the mountains, high mountains, and cold mountains because that was-- when we were going, it was like March. And we were climbing the mountain in snow. And the branches from-- we were holding onto the branches from the trees. So three steps up and four step down because it was very, very hard, very hard.

Later, we got in touch with somebody what smuggle us from these mountain and the other side, to Czechoslovakia. But we did. Some was in part mission impossible. Really. Normal time that would never happen. Nothing. But the fear that somebody will get you. It was so strong that-- stronger that you have to hold on and go ahead because somebody catch you. Was very hard.

So we went to Czechoslovakia. And over there, the Jewish community took care of us. Took us a place to stay. We were like two days. And we went for that we make funny papers in the consulate for the group what we were together that we

We went from Czechoslovakia we were to Hungary. And from Hungary, we went to Austria. In Austria, we have to stay for a few months. And they promise-- one day, Jewish community promise us that we get paper to go to Israel.

But in the meantime, my husband's cousin wrote us a letter, we shouldn't come to Israel because the shortage of food and shortage of housing. That is very difficult, we have a place to go someplace else, we shouldn't come.

So we got that acquainted with the American soldier, what was taking care, and the people, and what was traveling that time from camps, from different places. And I forgot what they say. What I was saying?

You became acquainted with an American soldier?

Yeah. We got an American soldier. And he's supposed to get us to France with the train from Hungary. But I didn't want to stay in Austria. So I told the office where the American people were that I am pregnant, and I don't want to go to Germany, and I want to go anyplace else, but not to Germany.

So every day, I put on more pillow. And I said, I am [INAUDIBLE], and I have to go someplace else. So he let us down in Belgium. He let us [? down--?] four people-- two boys, myself, and my husband. We were in Belgium and not language, no money, no place where to stay. We were on the road when the train start going to get to Brussels because the place where the soldier let us was nowhere, just empty place, Belgium.

Anyway, we did go walk until train around to Brussels. And my husband said, [INAUDIBLE] pass by three people and ask them if they talk Jewish because everybody speak French. And I remember that my sister in law friends came to us and say goodbye, that he's going to Belgium legally, and his name is-- I forgot his name. Anyway, Saul.

And my husband stopped the third man. He told them you talk Yiddish. You're Jewish? He said, yes. What you looking for? I said, looking for a [INAUDIBLE]. I think Hoffman. We looking for a-- he said, it's hundred Hoffman in telephone book. Maybe one of them will be your friend. He said, I went to a wedding and was Mr. Hoffman. And maybe this Hoffman will bring you to another Hoffman. So this way you can continue finding your friend.

So he said, I take you to the guy. He took us to the guy. And we ask him if he'd know somebody with the same name. He said, what are you looking? So I told him that Hoffman. He said, I am the Hoffman. Was just luck. We were pretty lucky the whole time. And he help us-- Mr. Hoffman help us a lot. [INAUDIBLE] wait-- wait. I call my nephew. The nephew was in Belgium. By that Hoffman, what we coming to., But really lucky. And we were staying in Belgium for almost five years.

Wow.

So in other [? places ?] we got three affidavits because we were just temporary in that country. We had papers for temporary apartment to stay. But when the three papers came from Australia, from Argentina, and from the United States that we can pick up one of them. And my husband pick up United States. And here we are! Yeah.

So let's get back a little bit to liberation.

Yeah, OK.

What did you think when you saw the Soviet soldiers?

Nothing. I was happy. I was very happy. Matter of fact, it was just before Passover. And I managed to get some food, and we make a seder. And I make with my sister in law. And i set that for 30 people in-between. They were Russian. And we told the Russian to go, sleep some place else because we don't have enough room. They said they don't want to go to Polacks. They want to stay here on the floor. And they sleep on the floor by us. Later, in the morning, everybody left. But I make a beautiful dinner, and everybody was happy.

The Russian, really, they came with the accordion. And they danced and sing where they were so happy. And we were happy that they liberate us.

So you all celebrated together being liberated?

Yeah, Yeah,

Did you ever hear rumors about Soviet soldiers and their treatment of other women, of people--

No. No.

No?

No. They were very nice to us. I don't know like someplace else and somebody else. But they were very nice to us. So was my sister-in-law, my brother-in-law, my mother in it. Two other people, two families because they didn't have enough room because part-- the Russian took over.

And so you said, once you were liberated, you saw your former nanny--

Yeah.

--who had been saving some photos for you.

Yeah. She called me, [NON-ENGLISH]! She came.

What about your father's friend who was supposed to stay--

My father went with the death march. Didn't come anymore. They killed him.

Yes, ma'am. But your father's friend who was supposed to keep all of your belongings from the store and the apartment?

Yeah. I went there with my husband to that place. And I said that you took-- we hided-- we left in your place, almost everything, what we had. And I would like to get something. And he said, get out from my house because I don't got nothing from you. Everything, what you give me, [INAUDIBLE] your father.

And he knew that my father is not there anymore. He tell me, if you show up again, I will chase you with dogs. I was very disappointed. But he is supposed to be my father's best friend. And I have nothing, nothing at all. I was afraid to come again. He said besides the dogs, I will see that you don't come here anymore.

The AK the organization against people, Jews, they call AKs I don't know if you know about it. But they are bad people. And he said that he will arrange that I shouldn't come here any more. I was afraid that he would kill me. But I didn't come there anymore, and I have nothing.

So what--

That was right after liberation.

Right after.

Yeah. And I settled. I had got from my friends a room. A day or two later, I went but I don't know where to go. I went there, and he said, the first thing he said, you are alive?

Really?

Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection [?Said, it is. I am alive. But don't you come here any more. That was Polacks. That's how they are. They talk to you sweet and nice. In the back, they can put a knife. And so just to clarify, he said, he did not have anything or that he gave it all away? What you mean? So your family's belongings? Yeah. Did he say he never took it? He didn't want to give it to me, nothing. He said that my father gave it to him. Oh. I see. He said, you can just have it. Yeah. Oh. I see. And I thought that when I will come there to him and he will give me something. He got the silverware from house, everything, everything. What is valuable, he took it with him. But he didn't give me nothing. Were other non-Jewish people in town? What was their reaction to the liberation? I don't remember what [INAUDIBLE]. So the other non-Jewish people in town--Yeah, Yeah, --were they happy about liberation or--Sure. Sure. Everybody was happy. We stay one year in Czestochowa until we start to travel. What news were you getting about other places in Poland or in Europe right after the war? Where I went? Like what kind of news were you getting? What were you learning about the war after you were freed? We didn't worry anything. We were glad that we are free, and we can go whatever we want. And in Belgium was very nice country, very, very nice. I wish they didn't got the affidavits to stay in Belgium. I would. Very nice country. Very nice people there. But in this year that you're living in your hometown--Yeah.

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--what were you learning about other areas of Poland, like what had happened during the war in other places?

I didn't know what the worry for anything.

You were just happy to be out? You weren't
We were just happy to go anywhere we can.
When did you hear about other concentration camps
Oh, yeah.
or killing centers?
Yeah. I don't know how many, but all over Poland in different, different cities. Somebody told us that the HASAG was almost best for the Jewish people in the country, the camp. But was good for us.
And so right after the war, you first heard about Auschwitz or
I wasn't in Auschwitz.
But you were learning about it?
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
Auschwitz, the war.
But takes time. We got liberated in May.
Mm-hmm.
But other part, people from the different cities stays in the camp still till the Russian came maybe till June, maybe later. We got early liberated, the first people, because our city is close to Germany. So they start backwards.
And so slowly, you start learning about these other camps?
Yeah.
When did you find out that your mother, brother, and grandmother had been when did you learn what had happened to them? You know where some people, when came to Auschwitz and they had seen what's going on, they run away. And they came to Czestochowa. And they told me that they went in there. Was Bad news, but that was the truth.
So slowly you're learning about these other places from other survivors, from other areas and
That's right.
other camps. So you knew that your mother, brother, and grandmother had been selected one way, you and your father another.
Yes.
When did you learn that they had been sent to Treblinka?
Right away.
Right away?

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Nobody wants to believe it, that they were put in the oven because this is behind the imagination that something like that can happen.

Were there are a lot of survivors that returned to your hometown?

Yeah. The people, what in HASAG, even from different cities, they were brought to the factory who got liberated. And some people from different cities went back to the place where what they were born And some remain just [INAUDIBLE]. But 90% people left from Poland.

Nobody wants to stay. I went after the war. I knew that my cousin is alive and my father, mother have property in Czestochowa before the war. That he signed up that I am dead to sell the property. And I was -- And I find out, my friend from Czestochowa, wrote, called me to Belgium.

Janka, you better come quick because your cousin is selling the property, because she knew about it. So I got the passport from Belgium, and I went to Poland. And I stopped them. So that was that one time I was back in Poland, and I got nervous breakdown because I couldn't walk on the streets and going with here my [INAUDIBLE], here my aunt, visit cousin here, lived there all around till I collapse. And I had to leave.

And so you already told us that you went through Austria, Hungary, and ended up in Belgium. What were you and your husband doing in Belgium while you were waiting for the affidavits?

My husband in Belgium start to work. We have the permission to work. But we had the green cards, not as-- the minute that we leave for good in Belgium, you temporary. And my husband was working in-- that's all. I was working. He was working in that-- And that time, I didn't have any kids. So was easy.

And in Belgium, my oldest of the three Freida, she was born in Belgium.

Oh. So right before y'all came.

Yeah. Beautiful country. When we left to say goodbye, lot of neighbors came to say goodbye to us. One was a taxi driver, and he said, don't take a taxi to the train. I am coming to take you. That's the only thing what I wanted to do. And the other peoples came with flower, and they couldn't understand why we leaving Belgium, that I have the affidavit come to United States. Yeah. I was very sad to leave because I really like the people. They were very nice, very nice.

And what languages did you learn?

French.

French? So by the time you're getting ready to leave Europe, you speak Polish, a little bit of English, and French.

And Yiddish.

And Yiddish. And Yiddish.

I didn't speak Yiddish when I got married. I didn't know. My husband was teaching me how to talk.

Oh. I see. So you learned Yiddish from him.

Yeah.

Oh, I see. Is that what y'all would speak at home? Yiddish?

Yeah. Not me. My grandma was talking to Yiddish to me. But I never answer her. I answer her in Polish. I understood, but not to speak.

But you and your husband, you spoke Yiddish at home? No. Not me, but my mother and my grandma, they speak Yiddish. Oh, OK. They Polish and Yiddish. But--And then your husband spoke Yiddish as well. Yeah. I see, I see. And my husband start to teach me Yiddish. I turn over the word "crazy." And everybody was laughing from me. But finally, I speak good Yiddish now. When did you leave Europe? Germany. Or when did you leave Belgium? Oh, Belgium? In '49, 1949. How did you get to the United States? How--How did you get to the United States? I got an affidavit from-- somebody from the United States ask for us. I don't know who. They don't know me then. I think that was from HIAS. I had a paper. I was trying to find out when we got here who was for the people. I don't know. I couldn't find out. And how did you travel to the US? Did you take a ship? By boat. Yeah, we come by boat. How long did that take? I think a week, a long time. [INAUDIBLE]. The [? gardener. ?] Oh, it was on. Was announcement, somebody is dead. But she didn't want to read because she didn't know how to read. So she came running to me that the theater, that I should buy ticket and go and live with her.

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She was very attached to me. And she couldn't believe my parents were leaving. And my mother didn't her.

So you came by ship? You came to the United States by ship?
Yeah.
And it took about a week?
Yeah.
What was it like traveling with a young baby for a week?
No. The kids got married later. But I want to go back. I didn't want to stay here. I didn't like it. We got an apartment, apartment in Long Beach. You know, was everything arrange from HIAS that I have apartment in Long Beach. And I didn't want to stay there.
I didn't like the people, how they are dressed. And I didn't like the homes. They are not homes. They are cabins because it's not how Belgium, even in Poland, there are big houses. Very beautiful. But here, we came. Everybody have how you call it a cabin. They have a bedroom and a kitchen. It's in a cabin.
Oh, it's very tiny.
Yeah. I didn't like it. I didn't unpack my suitcase for a whole year. I want to go back to Belgium, not Poland. For fun, it's all well. It's nothing else, just that I was born there. But no sympathy.
So when you're traveling to the United States
Yeah.
on the boat, you have Freida, a young baby
Yeah.
and your husband.
Yeah.
What was the trip like?
Very hard for me because I didn't she was going around. That time, she was three years old.
Oh. She was three?
Yeah, and she going around with a bag. When I'm [? apartment ?] think I should go on the boat, she's got the bag. She was walking around with the bag.
I guess, were you relieved to finally get off the boat after that week and
I don't know. Don't remember. No.
Where did you arrive? In New York?
Yeah. I was three days in New York. And my husband went to buy ticket to go someplace else. And he said to the cashier to give me two and a half tickets for Florida. So she said, why Florida? Because it warm, and my wife have to

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have a warm--

In here, in United States like, [? there ?] [? like ?] few years what got killed. But I have harm in my legs from the soap, from the machines, what I was working. So was pretty hard. So you moved to Long Beach. Yeah. And you have an apartment. Yeah. And you lived out of a suitcase for a year. So it was hard adjusting to life. Yeah. When did you start taking night school? You said you took English classes? You told me earlier that you took English classes when you moved here? I don't understand. So you told me when you first moved to America, you took English classes? Yeah. We went to New York. And I didn't like New York. And my husband went buy tickets to go someplace else, about two and a half tickets. So the cashier ask, you don't care? Where you going? Chicago or Los Angeles? He said, no, because I don't have family here. So I don't care. Just give ticket where it's nice and warm. So she said, go to Los Angeles. And she said, you need two tickets. Here I am. And once you moved and got settled in, you took English classes and all that. And when were your other children born? The what? Frieda was born in Belgium. Yeah. When were your other children born? Two here in Los Angeles. One was born in Boyle Heights, in the hospital, [INAUDIBLE], Boyle Heights, my daughter was born. And my son was born in Beverly Hills Hospital here. And now he is 57. And she's 60. Miriam is 60. She's gone backwards. He's 59. I have pretty good kids. I'm very, very lucky, very lucky. They live here. And they close to me. And they normal after everything, what we went through, now have a normal kids. It's a blessing. So and I am lucky. Here I have great grandchildren, that picture here. It's four great grandchildren-- two girls and two boys. And how many grandchildren? My granddaughter?

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So you have three children?

No. I have two daughters and a son.

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And how many grandchildren?
Five.
And then four great grandchildren?
There.
Wow.
They call me Gigi.
Gigi. How much of your experiences during the war did you tell your children or your grandchildren?
I didn't tell nobody nothing because I couldn't talk about it. My husband, who was called to UCLA, and he made a states with them. Have a tape. And they call me, I should come. And I told them, thank you. I don't go. I couldn't make it. I am surprised at myself that I accept this here because it's very, very heartbroken go through this again.
Because I don't have any family. This is mine family, what I the kids. That's all I have. Some people have uncles, have cousins. I don't have nobody. There was just me, my husband. Very nice guy, very nice guy. I miss him a lot. He was [INAUDIBLE] not nice to me. He was nice to friends, to help find job, to help with money. Really, he was very, very nice person.
He never, never asked me when I went shopping for clothes, how much you spend? How much you pay for this? How much you pay for never. You like it. Enjoy it. Always. When come holidays, he bought Valentine. He brought box of chocolate for the kids, for each one. And for me, one big one.
Yeah. And we came here, we belong to the organization from Poland, what called 39 Club for one had many, many years. Now I am not calling them anymore. Nobody there from friends. The second generation took it over. And from the second, nobody is there. It's very hard.
I had group what we play cards. And nobody. Just have myself something. I just wonder why I am alone, really alone. Just one girlfriend. Her husband was from my hometown. And we are getting together every second week. She comes here, or I go there. But nobody is here, nobody. Yeah.
Is there anything you wish people knew about living in Poland during that time?
I don't want to talk about it. And if want it, I can show you the tape from my husband, what he was talking. He talked. He told the UCLA everything.
[INAUDIBLE].
What?
Look at her.
So my last question for you is, is there anything we haven't talked about already that you want to add?
I don't think so. I just want to say that I am one of the luckiest person in the [INAUDIBLE] someplace else because I have a nice family now. And I miss my family, especially my husband, what I lost three years ago. That's all. What should I do? What should I do with the book?

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So would you like to show us the photo-- or first, I guess, could you tell us a little bit about the book, what it is, what's it

about?

What about it? It is how they treat the Jewish people the whole time we were there in Poland. Here you can see what kind terrible things they did. They throw babies from 10th floor down to-- little babies in-- terrible things they did. So this is-- our history like the book say, it is Jewish history in Poland. That's what it is. From 1939 till 1945.

And how did you get this book?

Just by coincidence because was fire in that place where the photographer is-- photographer. We have the pictures. The German bring the pictures to develop, but didn't have a chance to have the books because the fire started. And that person, what got the books, took whatever he could to bring it. I think that's like 10 books. And that's how I got this. He brought it to me when he asked me, you wanted the book? I said, sure I do. But this is--

So it was a--

This everything shows how the people were treat.

So it was a photographer that had taken photos during the war--

Yeah.

-- and at the camps. And he had all of these photos.

Yeah.

Put them together in a book.

Yeah.

And just by chance, he offered you a copy of it.

Yeah. So I accept it. And now I don't know what to do with it because I have don't how many years I have to live. I am now 92. And this have to be someplace be going that the people should know and remember what we went-- all the people of Poland. I [? better ?] think that this is in Poland and all over Europe where the Germans were occupying.

And this was one of the few items you brought with you from Poland?

Yeah.

So it's traveled all of this way.

Oh, [INAUDIBLE].

And I think you have a photo of HASAG where the labor camp?

HASAG.

HASAG? Yeah. And there's a photo in there--

No. That's it.

--that you have?

This is HASAG. This is HASAG here. The men's barrack, the ladies barrack, and how we were with the wiring around

the HASAG, we shouldn't run away.
Do you want to do close-ups now?
Now the question is, should I that leave this to the kids, or should I leave it with the museum?
Well, we'll talk after we finish the interview. We'll talk more about this.
OK?
Yes ma'am.
OK.
Can you have her hold up the book and show it?
And then could you hold up the book so we can see the cover of it?
Show us the cover of it.
Mom, mom, just hold up the front.
know.
No, not the the front first.
Show us the book.
But it's in Polish.
That's OK.
All right.
And then, could we see the HASAG?
The cover is ripping off. [INAUDIBLE].
Yeah.
[INAUDIBLE].
And so here is the labor camp you were at for six years.
[INAUDIBLE] close-up. [INAUDIBLE] ask her a question about this?
And so these are all pictures of different parts of the camp?
Yeah. The barracks was behind the factory, was built especially for us. This was wired all around. Nobody could go ou from that.
Do you want to do the other photos after?
[INAUDIBLE].

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But here is written that is Czestochowa.

So Ms. Kushynski, if you have nothing else you want to add, we'll-- OK. So this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Hannah Kushynski on August 23, 2016.

So maybe this is-- I belong now to the $Caf\tilde{A}$ © Europa, what is part of the [? Freida?] [? Moore?] Jewish community. service. I belong to them.

All right.