This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Wes Orlowski. It's being conducted by Nancy Cooey on August 15, 2018. Wes, can you start off by you telling me your name at birth?

I was born-- my original first name and last name sounded-- and it still does-- Wiesław Orlowski. My middle name is Józef In about 45 years ago, when I was already in this country, I acquired a nickname Wes, because it was easier for Americans to remember.

So returning to my date of birth, I was born on May 17, 1935. I am 83 years old now. I was born, obviously, before World War II in a small Polish town which was about half and half Polish Catholics and Jews, mostly Orthodox.

One of the most important things to know about this town that was a very historic town, which these two religions coexisted with the best harmony one can imagine. There are no recorded incidents of any conflicts between these two religions in that small town. And the town was located about 20 miles southeast of Warsaw. My mother came to this town in 1929 or 1930. My father was born nearby and live most of his adult life either in town, or in concentration camps, or in western Poland, where he resettled.

Wait. What year were your parents born?

My father was born in year 1905 and my mother was born in 1910. And my mother came to town, as I said, from southern Poland, which used to be called, before 1918, before Poland regained its independence, was called Galicia, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Those who know history would know that Poland didn't exist on the maps for about 125 years, and when it regain independence in 1918, was made up of three previously partitioned parts-- Prussian on the west, Russia on the east, and Austro-Hungarian Empire on the south, which included Galicia.

How did your parents meet?

My parents met, most likely, if I can recall it well, in the post office of Góra Kalwaria. My mother was a teacher in a nearby village, and my father, at the time, was working at the post office. My father was a bachelor at that time and he had great ease of communication with people. So I am not surprised they met.

They married in 1931. I have a beautiful picture showing their wedding. And I was born four years later. My father was an accountant. He worked in the bank for some time and also in post office. And my mother was grammar school teacher. She was really gifted and praised by many parents for having exceptional human skills and ability to communicate with children and motivate children.

So my first memories were started with the age about three when my father was assigned a job, temporary job outside of our town, and I was sent to the store, and at I, already at that time, I had the good sense of humor. I was kind of cracking jokes, which I believe were told to me.

And then I think I remember, but I'm not sure which was it. My first major shocking experiences were related to the war, because in 1939 at the beginning of September, when Germans were bombing Polish cities, and they attacking Poland from the West, Warsaw was attacked relatively early by bombers. And although there was only 20 miles between Warsaw and Góra Kalwaria, German bombers apparently made a mistake, and they were looking for military objects.

They bomb the residential part of our town, although there were military barracks on the other end of the town, they were all made of bricks covered with the yellow shingles made of clay. And from the air, they could have looked identical to the big hospital area which was next to my house. So they made a mistake and they drop several bombs.

And one of them landed very near of my house, where family of 11 people, escapees from Warsaw, were hiding. The escapees from Warsaw, when they thought they saved their life by running from Warsaw, however, the German bomb dropped on that house, killed all of them. 10 of them were killed, only one person was saved.

Before we get too far into your memories of the war and the beginning of the war, can you tell me more about your family background, your father's family and where they came from as well as your mother's?

So starting with my father, my father's family was-- it's a long history, because one of my uncles was keeping the history of our family. Unfortunately, this book, which was handwritten book which was keeping notes, was destroyed after the war.

But what I remember, what was read to me was that Polish kings nominated in 17th century one of our ancestors. He was a general, Józef Orłowski as a commander of an old town which had the medieval walls around there, and then there was water around-- I'm missing terms--

The moat.

The moat. And this structure survive for several centuries defending eastern territories of Poland against the invasions of Tartars and other armies which were coming, trying to conquer Europe from eastern.

Was it in Góra Kalwaria also, or elsewhere?

No, Góra Kalwaria was more to the west, on Vistula River. Góra Kalwaria was in [? the east, ?] located on the western shore of Vistula River, which was the main river in Poland, running from the almost the border with Czech Republic-- and now was Czechoslovakia, at that time-- to Baltic Sea.

So where did this ancestor live?

Some of them, they lived in this area. Others lived in which is called Ukraina. And my great-grandfather was participant in 1970-71 uprising against Russians.

1871?

1870. There was called powstanie styczniowe, which is-- in translation it's January Uprising. But was 1870-1871. And he was caught by Russians and sent to Siberia.

He was very intelligent man. And he learned Russian quickly. He changed his physiognomy by starting a beard, sideburns, and hairstyle, and acquire false documents, and then ran away from this camp, and then was traveling mostly by foot, sometime working as a handyman on the way to earn some money for food. But it took him 11 and 1/2 months by foot to get from Siberia back to the area which he lived near Warsaw.

Meanwhile, all his property, including quite an amount of land, was confiscated by Russians. So he had to start his life from square one. He managed to have two children, a boy and girl, which were raised by somebody else because he became ill. And he died very shortly afterwards. So I still visit his grave when I am in Warsaw. And it's one of the--

What was his name?

Pardon me?

What was his name?

His name was-- so the one which was nominated by Polish kings was Józef And my grandfather was Karel. And the one which is at the cemetery-- my memory now escaped. I will recall, probably, during this conversation.

So did your mother's family have a colorful past much like that?

Just returning to my father--

Oh, sure.

--to my grandfather's, they came from impoverished nobility of medium kind of the level. They had their own coat of arms, and everything was a recorded. And my uncle was keeping these records, which unfortunately were destroyed.

On my mother's side, my mother came-- my mother was raised on a small farm in the mountains. I would call it-- she was a mountaineer. I was visiting this area many times after the war, and I met all her cousins. Family was rather big.

When my father was born he was the oldest. And he had three sisters. My mother had one sister and four brothers. And there were two or three who died because of the illnesses at the time and bad medical care, obviously.

So it was, I would say, strange combination of the history of these two families. And I have to admit they-- my parents were not the best matched couple as I see it, especially from the distance of time. However, I loved my both parents.

And when my father was arrested in 1943 in Warsaw-- he was traveling between Warsaw and Góra Kalwaria often and trading with different items. One of the most important items he was trading was golden coins, because those who know life in Poland during occupation-- they would know that everybody was trading, even children. It was either barter or cash. Everybody knew value of everything else.

All was illegal. Germans absolutely didn't allow trading unless it was sanctioned by them, by stores which they would approve. And you have to be either confidant or some other-- doing some other functions useful for Germans. All the trades was illegal. But everybody was really smuggling to survive. Jobs were very scarce. Food was difficult to obtain even if you had money. You couldn't enter the store and buy what you wanted.

So my mother was in early-- when my father was traveling between Warsaw and Góra Kalwaria my mother was very involved in social movements. My mother was involved in the trade-- the labor union, the teachers' labor union. She was demonstrating in 1937-8, I know from her memories. I was too small to remember that. There were demonstrations for higher salaries, for better working conditions, and so on-- partially successful.

During the war my mother relatively quickly joined underground movement which was led by the Polish government in exile in London.

Can you--

That was pro-Western. It was called Armia Krajowa. In English-- The acronym was AK. In English was National Army. Yes?

Can you tell me about your mother's occupation as a teacher-- what she taught and her role within the community?

Before war my mother was teaching grades 1 to 5, I believe-- 4 or 5. And she was teaching all basic-- usually teachers on that level, they will have specialties. So she was teaching history, geography, Polish language-- less sciences.

However, during the war Germans-- it was very lucky that in our town they were somehow more liberal. And we had two schools. And each was-- had classes 1 to 7. However, what I heard-- at the same time in different parts of Poland, they were allowed-- the classes were only from 1 to 4. And obviously, they wouldn't teaching history, geography, anything which would enlighten people. They wanted Poles to just read and write and do the basic calculus. All middle schools, all universities were all forbidden.

However, there was a lot of underground schooling. There were regular classes in people's houses. Some of them denounced. People were arrested, tortured sometime. There were all kinds of sanctions. But many, many of the schools, because of the solidarity between the people-- everybody was interested having the

children educated in spite of German restrictions. Most of the schools, I would say, survive. And there were all different levels. Diplomas were given. Exams were passed.

It was just very normal and popular for-- and people were chipping in in different ways. For example, the parents of this-- for example, my mother was giving tutorials after the regular school hours. There are different kids are coming different days, different hours to my house. And my mom was teaching them, helping them to catch up to the level which was expected. And they were either less talented or they had harder conditions at home, parents which are uneducated and they couldn't help them with homework. So my mother was fulfilling that role.

And she was paid with real goods, usually food like farmer's cheese, homemade bread, eggs, carrots, onions-- chicken, sometime, which was already plucked and ready to cook for soup or whatever. So we are relatively-- and there were periods of time when it was shortage of food, where there were no tutorials and they, depending on the tension and what was happening in outside world, especially at the beginning of the war and just before the end of war, when there were first uprisings in Warsaw ghetto, and then Warsaw Uprising of 1944, which were major upheaval for the Warsaw and near surroundings, where we lived.

So starting at the beginning of the war, do you remember hearing about the war? Like, hearing about the tensions between the Germans on the radio, or the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany?

We were not allowed to have radios.

Before the war?

Before war, yes. Oh, you're talking about before war.

Yeah, just, did you have any sense that a war was coming before September 1?

Yes and no. There were some talks. But most of the population were kept in the belief-- and that included Jewish population. I mean, all citizens were kept under belief that if Germans attack-- that was considered such a possibility-- French and English are going to attack from the West, because there were international agreements signed between the governments where the Western powers declare that if Poland is attacked they're going to attack, as well.

However, what we learned later-- and obviously Hitler and his intelligence services had very good recognition of the mood and plans which French and German had. And that's what I learned was later, obviously. When I was 4, 5, 6 years old I didn't know that. But I knew it shortly after the war. Germans kept [? 93% ?] of the armies in the Eastern Front. And they were absolutely vulnerable from the West.

And Poles, Polish army and civilians who were defending Warsaw for several weeks-- Warsaw was encircled by German army, but there were organized resistance. And there were some war-- the ammunition and the arms to protect Warsaw against the German army. And it was very heroic defense. However, Germans had superiority in the air. They were bombing. And they have superior tanks. So in spite of the barricades and all these fortifications which were built around the outskirts-- on the outskirts of center of the city, Warsaw was conquered after several weeks.

So what was the response from your parents when the war began? Was there any talk about fleeing the area and going elsewhere?

Yes. That's very good question, because what happened-- after the first bombs were dropped on Góra Kalwaria there was real. It stopped to be just somewhere else-- Germans are attacking and they come here eventually, or maybe Polish army would defend them. Maybe French and Germans would attack from the West. The whole resistance was hinging on that promise, because otherwise Poland realized, its population realized that they didn't have any chance, because the Germans with huge amount of the very well trained and well equipped, quite modern arms, artillery, airplanes, and so on.

And so what happens here-- that my parents, at the very beginning, after the first bombing organize a group

of families. Perhaps was six, seven people in that group, plus the owner of the big truck-- Mr. Viktor [? Habalitski ?] was his name. We packed our belongings within hours, packed our belongings on the top of the truck. And we are running towards Russia to escape Germans.

On the roads-- and the roads were narrow-- whole traffic was mostly towards East. And there were columns and columns. Sometime trucks, which were rarity. Smaller cars were also rarity. Mostly was carts pulled by horses and people loading their belongings. And there were cars as long as you can reach by sight.

What German firefight-- the planes were doing, they were running along, flying along these roads. And from the machine guns and also smaller bombs they were dropped on these convoys. So whenever we heard-- and we could distinguish between Polish aircraft and German aircraft. They were sounding differently.

By the sound? Yeah.

And my task, on the top of the track, was to look to the west and watch and listen for the sounds. And I was the one who was bringing attention of the adults. And then what people were doing-- they running quickly to the left and the right side, leaving truck in the side-- the center of the road. And they were hiding in between the potato or rye or wheat, whenever we could-- or trees, if it was nearby.

Yeah, the fields.

And we're sitting there waiting until they go away, because they came for a couple minutes and they were gone. And then maybe next time, whether it would be the same day or maybe three times next day-- was nothing regular or not unpredictable. This way we reached Russian borders, which was Soviet Union at that time. But we call it Russian.

And since Russians entered Poland from the east on September 17, we were at that time in Russia already-- not deep. And we were ordered to go back towards west, towards Poland itself-- which was still Poland, but there was already occupied by Russians, that territory.

And not many people know that the Russia took more territory in 1939, September, than Germans took before that. However, the population density was much higher in the Western territories then were Eastern territories. Also, Eastern territories had much more minorities.

And Russia started to resettle Poles to Siberia or towards the Kazakhstan and this-- towards Siberia, towards-- they were less organized than German, but they had trains which were equipped with big-- with cars adapted to transport pigs. There were no passenger cars. And they were sent to-- which they later was called kulaks, right?

Yeah.

Gulags.

So during this evacuation and when you were listening out for the airplanes coming, do you remember being scared? Weren't you frightened or--

Well, scared is understatement. I had my shorts full of-- almost.

[LAUGHTER]

Were you able to comprehend it?

What's a child's reaction when sees front of the plane going towards you and the almost aiming at you? And they were coming very low sometime. So when they coming low we are definitely out of truck already. But it was very, very scary experience, and one which you cannot forget till the end of your life.

Do you remember what your parents told you? Do you remember them communicating with you at this time?

They were scared themself. So this is the time when children mature much faster than their chronological calendars.

During the war my father was already in Auschwitz. My mother was part of this underground movement. And during the day, quite often, when she was at work my house looked normal. There's nothing unusual. But on occasion, once every week, every two weeks, on an irregular basis we have a crew coming to our house. Crew-- those are the members of the same underground movement which my mother belonged.

Yeah, AK.

And they were coming with the radio transmitter receiver in pieces. Some of the pieces were hidden in our house. Some they were bringing and putting together in minutes, literally. And they are starting communication by Morse code with a radio base which was located on the outskirts of London. And they were communicating forth and back information which is coded-- also, besides the Morse code, they were also using some coded-- so there was not easy.

However, Germans knew about these stations, that they exist. However, they couldn't easily find them because there are villages, small towns. They couldn't be everywhere all the time. So my task was that as soon as this station was ready to go I was told to go outside. Although I remember sometime the Morse code, I can hear it today-- dee-dee-dee da, da, da, da are the key.

My task was to go outside-- and I had friends who were fulfilling similar role, although sometimes they didn't know all the details because we didn't talk among ourselves all the details for obvious reasons-- and was to look for the German-- they look like a pickup truck today, but it was a low truck, small truck which dipole antenna, antenna which allows to determine from which direction signal is coming from that station. So to determine where is exact location of that station of that transmitter they had to have two measurements from different angles. And then, on the map they could identify very exactly which-- almost which house that this transmitter was located.

So my task and my friends' task was to detect existence of these German trucks nearby and notify my mother-- one to another one. We're standing on the corners of the streets. So within seconds my mother knew that there is a truck nearby. And my mother was running inside of our house and telling the crew. They were taking apart that radio station, hiding whatever they could, take the rest of them.

And they-- obviously, they are not running along the streets. They were going in the back of our house through the orchards-- orchard to orchard, orchard to orchard, never going to the town itself, but on the outskirts, through the dense-- whatever the first forest. And usually there were no Germans in this area. Besides, they knew exactly where the concentration German were, police headquarters. When they're coming to town they knew exactly where to go and not to go.

So how often-- well, how many times do you remember seeing a truck and having to warn your mother that it was coming?

Fortunately, not even once we detected this truck at the time when a radio station-- I saw these trucks. But at that time there was never that station in my house. So we were lucky.

This same crew which came to us several times-- we learned they were shot when they were jumping through-- were escaping. And they were machine gunned. They were decimated, all of them. Two or three were coming to our house. Another crew was coming. But they were detected and killed in some neighboring small town.

So it was in a different town that that happened?

Yes. They were going from town to town, from different places on a regular basis unpredictable for anybody else. But they have their own system which allowed them to coordinate with the house owner and having a system of people who were protecting them from-- this one case the system failed, obviously. And they were killed.

So I'm sure you talked to your mother at some point, especially after the war, about her experience. Did she share with you how she got involved with the underground movement?

Yes. My mom was very friendly with the principal of the school in which she was teaching and his wife, who was a teacher as well. And this lady-- she was the head of that women's division in support of other girl fighters, because my mom didn't have-- she didn't train. She knew how to shoot, but she was not really specially trained. And there was not a role for the women. There was mostly role for men.

The women had a lot of supportive roles. One of them, for example, was-- and there was, as a part of underground movement but also as an interest of my mother-- because as a teacher she had a lot of Jewish kids as her pupils. By average in her classes was around 50% of the kids were Jewish before ghetto was created in 1940. And it did existed for about half a year.

So my mom had a lot of good acquaintances-- I wouldn't say closest friends, but a lot of people who respected her from both religions, including orthodox Jews. Many of them, they were sending their kids not only to cheder, Jewish school, but they're sending them to the public schools to learn Polish because they were doing business. Most of the stores in our town were Jewish owned. There were excellent relationship between both religions. And as I mentioned, no accidents.

So my mom was involved-- at the very beginning, there was a lot of smuggling going on between Warsaw, which was the biggest center where you could get food, or from countryside farms to the ghetto in Góra Kalwaria. Ghetto in Góra Kalwaria was very unusual because it did have sections with the barbed wire fences, however, especially during the night the traffic was unbelievable. Somehow people were able to bribe the guards, which were part of Judenrat organization which was set up to communicate between Germans and Jewish populations.

So the guards were mostly Jewish police.

Jewish with the bands on the arm, a civilian, or semi-civilian dressed. But during the night was like a shift. And I had a friend who had-- his house windows were looking at the ghetto fence. And I had to pass-- my house was located less than half a mile from border of the ghetto.

What streets was the ghetto on? Do you remember?

Piarska. There are descriptions of that. For example, good friend of my mother is a gentleman who died recently. His name was Henryk Price. Here's article about him. And I always admiring him.

He ran away from ghetto. And there's one recording in Holocaust Museum which you sent to me the URL. And his-- the gentleman's name is Felix Kartman. He describes in much better-- in greater detail which I would be able to describe what was going on inside, because I was not inside, Polish of non-Jewish-- non-Jews who are not allowed to enter.

So can you tell me a bit more about your mother's involvement in the underground movement and some of the tasks that she was given to do?

So one of the tasks my mother took, and also she was assigned later, officially, by the underground movement was to find people who would be actively involved in smuggling food to ghetto either from countryside, by her knowledge of the farmers who were parents of the children which she was teaching in the school, or people who were traveling regularly or willing to travel to Warsaw and bring some items which were not regularly available locally.

And there's too many names to mention here. But they are people still alive, my peers, or people who already recorded in the archives of Holocaust Museum, like Mr. Felix Kartman and Mr. Abram Henryk Price. The YouTubes-- they are very detailed interviews with him.

My mother was on very good terms with him. Last time I visited him about 10 years ago. And I spoke to his

sister a couple weeks ago by phone. This gentleman died in the age of 101 and half. Unbelievable. And he's strong physically and mentally. He describes his life in great details. And there is so much to be learned about his life and the life of other people.

So your mother worked with him?

My mother work with him after the war in different organizations. And but my mother knew him. And he knew both my parents because I talked to him about my father, especially, from before war. He knew my father quite well.

Did your mother ever go to the ghetto when she was trying to get food into the ghetto from all these farmers?

As I mentioned, the non-Jews were restricted. They were not allowed to enter. So but through mutual friends and mutual acquaintances there was quite good communication. And again, in spite of German regulations people tried to conduct normal life. By normal life I mean people are working in ghetto. People are trying to preserve food, to sell items.

Everybody believed in the ghetto that this just temporary solution, that they will be resettled to a different place. They will be saved from-- people didn't want to admit that this is any of the organized massacre, and they are going to be killed. Everybody had hope. And as you well known, that kept people going and living, because once you remove the hope from human beings our life doesn't make sense.

So obviously, there were moments when people becoming depressed or they stopped to be positive and optimistic. But there was role of others to keep their spirit alive. And so there were all kind of the preoccupations, including small theater, singing groups, educational aspects, organizations were getting together and having discussions.

Outside the ghetto or inside?

Inside.

Inside the ghetto.

Everything inside of the ghetto. And unbelievable overcrowding. People were living sometime 8-- 6, 8, up to 10 people in one room. Incredible. But this gentlemen, like these three people whom I am well familiar and I knew them, was Henryk Price, Felix Kartman, and Henryk Majewski

So they were friends of yours who were in the ghetto?

Those are the people who were able to escape, hide. And they were able to survive. And they returned to Góra Kalwaria after. Out of around three and a half thousand Jewish people who lived in pre-war Poland, that's what people who-- were people who were able to--

So did you have friends who were in the ghetto?

Not in my age and not my classmates. But they were friends of my friends, a lot of people whom I knew because of my parents' acquaintance being of-- there's very interesting story. One of my three or four best friends, they live in this-- closer to center of town. And they had a house with several rooms.

My friends-- and his last name is Ptak, Witold Ptak.

How do you spell that?

P-T-A-K, which in translation means a bird, a bird. Ptak.

And his first name was?

His name is Witold. W-I-T-O-L-D, Witold. I was quite often visiting him. And one of the reasons was that his grandma was doing excellent white borscht, which is made of-- it's like a sourdough soup, kind of. I don't know how to translate it even in English. It's made of the sourdough bread, which was added some aging, some-- like you make kefir or--

Oh, it was fermented?

Ferment. Went through the process of fermentation. So to get the essence of that I was coming to their house and bringing empty bottle, like one-liter bottle. I was paying for it whatever was asked. And then it was a broth for making soup, potatoes added.

And one of my [INAUDIBLE] when my mother was in school, I was doing the cooking. I was preparing dinner. And my mother-- and I was six, seven, eight years old, but I was preparing dinner. My mother came from school quite often, either dinner was ready or not much left to finish the dinner.

So my friend's uncle, which was brother of his mother's-- mother's brother-- he fell with-- in love with a Jewish girl. At the beginning of ghetto, when she was surrounded and she was forced to resettle and live in the ghetto, she escaped-- like a lot of people did, but not high percentage. And it was interesting that people who were escaping from ghetto, they either tried to be in countryside, which was easier to hide, living with a farmer like this gentleman, Henryk Price.

He was adopted. He got a false document and he was adopted by a family of farmers who had son of similar age who didn't return from war. He was part of the Polish army and he did not return. And this family adopted Mr. Price.

So what happened to the uncle's girlfriend?

When she escaped from Góra Kalwaria she went to another ghetto in a small town on the other side of the Vistula River. There was no bridge, so you had to be-- there were some special people who, for a fee, they took you in the small boat.

Oh, a ferry.

One, two person-- three people they could fit on that ferry. So it was just basically like a major canoe, and a long stick. And that's the way they got on the other side of the river. The river was quite substantial. And you could get in troubles if you tried to swim through, across.

Anyhow, so she went to another ghetto which was much more liberal, so to speak, much easier to get in and out and so on. And then, again, she escaped from there because he was able-- he was working at the cemeteries of smaller towns. And he found, on the grave, a name of the Polish woman-- and her name was Janina-- fitting the age. He went to the priest and he got falsified document for the name of Janina-- I forgot the name. And she was under that name till they got married, this couple.

Wow.

But meanwhile-- that was not the end of the story. Meanwhile, she was sent under that falsified name-- and there was Jews not as much as non-Jews. They were sent to Germany to work on the farms because Germans were short of manual-- menial workers. And so a lot of Poles, depending on the historian, but there are calculations-- at least one million Poles work on the farms in Germany during the war. And were obviously all forced. They were paid a little bit, a tiny bit, given food and shelter. And many of them survive.

And to the extent that the family of bakers who own the bakery, German, in the small town-- they love her so much that they-- being older, they wanted to give the bakery to her. However, she didn't want to stay in Germany. She returned after the war to Góra Kalwaria. And she married my friend's uncle. And her name is Salomea or Salika, they call her-- her real name. And again, I forgot her real last name. But they had two children. They had children again. And my friend was baptizing-- you know, he was--

A godfather?

Godfather, exactly. He was godfather of one of the children of that Salika.

So were a lot of people in your town sent to work in Germany? Of non-Jews?

Surprisingly, I cannot recall many. But I know many others, including my cousins, which I visited later in Belgium. My cousin met her husband, who came from Belgium. He was of Polish descent. She was of Polish descent from Poland. They married and they settled in Belgium. They had two daughters. And I visited them after the war several times in Belgium.

Not from our town. Somehow-- if they were I was not familiar with them. Small percentage. But I've heard about many, many others who went and returned.

A lot of people in our town were in hiding. I wouldn't say majority-- definitely not. But in my family, one of my cousins was-- most of the German occupation he was just hiding. He was not at home because if he showed at home, he would be either denounced or he would be sought by police--

Why?

--and he would be arrested. Because they had records. Either they beat somebody, some German, and they ran away. And police knew who was he-- came home, he was gone. So luckily, they-- nobody got-- Germans didn't [? kill ?] the other members of the family. But he was gone. And he's still alive. He's 90-something.

What's his name?

His name is [Vicek Kralewski. He was kin to my grandma. My grandma was Kralewska from her maiden name, before she got married.

How do you spell his last name?

Krawlewska. K-R-A-L-E-W-S-K-A, Kralewska. Zuzanna. Z-U-Z-A-N-N-A, Zuzanna.

So that was your grandmother, was Zuzanna?

Grandmother.

What, on your--

My father's mother.

So we haven't talked about your father very much.

That's right. So my father was arrested in Warsaw. And miraculously--

But before that, he-- so that was in 1943 that he was arrested.

Yes.

But before that, what was he doing during beginning of the war?

He was traveling between Warsaw and Góra Kalwaria. But then, more and more, he was staying in Warsaw because he's-- what trading he was doing involved presence of big-- like a farmer's market in Warsaw. Góra Kalwaria had farmer's market where farmers were coming once a week with their horse-pulled car full of goods which they grew. Warsaw had market, but it was less farmers, but more middlemen and woman.

And we could get a lot of interesting things that not everything was exposed. There are certain things which

are shown and other things which were the behind counter or underneath. Only when you struck a conversation. And since people got familiar with you, they had some level of trust that they tell you, you know, I have this yet, I have that yet. I have other--

And those were contraband materials, or black market kind of things?

Definitely materials which Germans didn't allow, including cold cuts.

Really?

Unfortunately, there were not refrigerations. So you can imagine, they have to be fresh and sold. They couldn't take them outside. So by the end of day they were selling for less and less and less. Also, you could bargain. You could--

Barter.

Not only-- no, no. I'm talking about in selling and in Mid-Eastern markets, if this salesperson sells at nominal price they are not fully satisfied, although they got fully amount of money.

You mean like haggle for things.

Haggle is the word. You need to haggle. And the more you haggle, you know one another better. And there is a satisfaction for both sides involved. There is a more pleasant feeling about the transaction when you haggle.

Yeah. So it feels like it's earned on some level.

If you just pay what you are asked for it's-- you don't get much respect from the salesperson. That's the psychology of especially small town, village.

So your father was acting as one of these middle people of selling things?

He was middle people because he didn't produce anything. He was buying and selling. But you need to know where to buy, at what price. You need to know where to go and sell. And you buy through your own trusted channels and you sell where it's a lot of people. And you, again, establish certain relationship.

You sell certain items to strangers, maybe most of them. But you have your own customers who know you, come. And you are always standing in the same place. Or it is the same area. And people recognize one another, and they wave. And they go, sometimes, to decide-- they don't do transaction when everybody is looking at their hands.

Well, that's an--

So there's the whole culture.

That's an occupational shift for your father, right?

Absolutely.

Because he was an accountant.

Absolutely.

And then he moved into this. Why did he switch?

Because the pay-- couldn't get a job at the very beginning. Pay was poor. And you could be much better off. And later, as I learn, my father-- and those are-- I don't have 100% proof, but I think my father was renting

room from some people, and then, I think, from a lady. And there could have been some relationship there which he was obviously hiding from my mother. My mother-- you know, women have this instinct and can sense. However, we did not have proof.

So this was in Warsaw that he was renting--

It was Warsaw itself. So when he was arrested, barely anybody in our small town knew. Only-- that he was arrested, because he was not often coming to Góra Kalwaria. So he was not coming for longer time. He was arrested, sent to Auschwitz.

And people didn't know about that. Only closest, trusted people knew about that. We didn't broadcast it. We didn't spread that information. Obviously, his mother, his sisters knew about that. And they, again, didn't talk to anybody about that because it was nobody's interest to talk about that.

Right.

It was too many questions. People were asking so and so and so on. Avoid unnecessary lying or making stories, people rather avoiding subjects.

So why was he arrested?

That's a big mystery which is mystery to me till today. I do not have 100% proof, but there are hypotheses which were my mother's hypotheses. And since my mother died thirty three years ago, they are my hypotheses. And I never met anybody who really knew my father in Warsaw who would get the-- from the first hand.

And your father wouldn't tell you either?

My father had different theories. And he was avoiding the subject. And besides, in 1946 my parents divorced. So my father changed the location. He moved to so-called regained territories from Germany. He started a new family in [PLACE NAME]. He had two children there. And I maintained very loose relationship to the extent that when I immigrated-- I left Poland in 1970.

And he died in 1983. My mother died 1985. My mother died in my home in United States. My father died in Poland, 1983, in a town called [PLACE NAME]. And I was on his grave. However, I didn't maintain the relationship with his new family.

So he was sent to Auschwitz immediately, or was he imprisoned in Warsaw?

First he was tortured in Warsaw special headquarters where they specialized in torturing prisoners to get the information about the co-workers, what he knew about underground movement. They didn't get much because he didn't know much. The underground movement in Góra Kalwaria didn't accept my father. He did apply for it.

And my mother would be-- wouldn't agree for that because he was traveling a lot and he was talkative. And he might not keep the secrets. In underground movement most of the people who were members, they knew only pseudonyms of one another unless they knew themselves from before. But that was rather recommended that you work together with people who you didn't know before and use pseudonyms which were different from your real names. In the case you are arrested, you are beaten, tortured, you couldn't say if you didn't know.

Right. Did your mother have a pseudonym?

My mother had a pseudonym. Everything is written. I have books describing [INAUDIBLE] by a historian who wrote a book, Heroes of Two Towns. And it describes especially one-- it's in Polish. [POLISH] in Polish, in original. And yes, she did.

And so after the removal of the ghetto from Góra Kalwaria, as you can imagine, a lot of real estate left. There are 3,000 people very crowded. But it was a lot of empty housing which Germans didn't care, because they were not especially high quality housing. They are not office buildings. They did confiscate my school. And they keeping their hospital. They keeping, for a certain time, school for German children, families, German officials who were in town.

And then there was a hospital for the German prisoners who were returning from Eastern Front. And I vividly remember when they were getting out the train and then walk through the town, and how they were wrapped around up to, sometime, barely their noses were sticking from the bandages around. Those were people who were-- the soldiers who were returning from Stalingrad, when Germans were-- Russians defended themself.

And then it was the-- from the defense mode they started to press. And there was full winter. Germans absolutely unprepared to survive Russian, Siberian type of the weather. And many of them they lost parts of the body-- noses, ears.

They were all wrapped around when they were coming for the convalescent-- for recovery. There was a military hospital there when they were staying for a couple months. And they were going back to Germany, because they were not-- many of them, they're not capable to fight anymore. And they had huge shortage of manpower by the end of the year.

So there were German families living in Góra Kalwaria?

Yes. But they were all implants. There were few German families who--

Are native.

--who are native. And most often, they were cooperation-- they knew German language. And they are cooperating with authorities. But Polish underground movement's task was to watch, monitor, and eventually execute these traitors. And one of these German, his name is Müller. He was killed by underground movement.

And there was one incident when, in the school, when I was attending, one boy came and he was crying, saying that Germans killed his older brother. It was quite an age difference. I knew it from my person who was temporarily living in my house. And they had these conferences and training sessions after curfew.

In your house.

In my house. So it was part of the activities of my mother. She allowed her house to be place when fighters, underground movement fighters were training, exchanging information, getting commands to do. And there was execution squad came. And it was reporting to this gentleman-- his name was Jan Zawada It's written in that book-- his pseudonym was. And he was pre-war officer which lived under pseudonym Jan Zavada But his name was [? Martoschewski-- ?] real name.

And they were reporting that they killed two traitors. And they left a short note on the chest-- this is a traitor who was warned twice. And by underground court decisions he was executed by AK, which was underground army.

So this boy was crying, telling his colleagues that his younger brother-- older brother was killed by Germans. And that was not true. I knew the truth. He was killed because he was traitor. But obviously, was not interests of the boy to tell the truth.

So a lot of stories which you hear and you read not always were truth, because for whatever reasons people were hiding the real reasons. And I saw it again and again and again. And it was in all the religions. Doesn't matter-- age. For different reasons people are having second mask, second face to survive. And there were different motives. But there was a fight for survival. First was life, to safe. And second was to get food.

So the trainings that were hosted at your mother's house-- do you remember that? And do you remember--

Absolutely.

--what kind of trainings they were doing?

Quite often doors were closed. And my bed was literally one yard from the door. Door was thin. And they were talking regular voice. Besides, there was a keyhole which I could see through. And I-- many of the voices I recognized because they happened to be parents of my colleagues, or friends. They're coming to my house. And they were training, including this execution team.

Do you remember any of their names?

Of the-- oh, I do remember all of them.

All of them.

All of them, because they died. All of them. There were tens of names. I could-- and I remember many of them because I knew the voices, because I was in their houses and they were parents. Or they were just acquaintances. So if I didn't hear first time, when I could recognize the voice through the keyhole, I could see who was there. And I knew. And so I knew where are the places where the hidden maps were for the manual for training officers.

So they hid things in your house, as well?

In my house. There was--

Where?

--at least one dozen of the places. Usual-- we have two small attics on our level, which was like roof coming down.

It was A-frame.

And there were doors. A-frame. And then was main attic, and there was entrance from the kitchen. You had to have a ladder, enter in the attic. In the attic-- and is this related to the radio transmission-- there was a metal wire spread between the rafters, one to another-- one very dense. And they were wrapped with the fabric.

They pretending to be for drying clothing, the ropes for drying clothing. However, they were not used for that purpose. They were used as antenna. So that end of that wire went into the wall down to my kitchen and then came out in the form of power socket. But if you plugged the-- your whatever, hairbrush or-- you couldn't get any power there because there was no power.

This transmitter was connected when this crew was coming. They had the plug. And they will plug it in that one outlet in entire house which they already knew and I knew is not for power. That was one of the reasons why coming to our house, because antenna-- they will have to spread antenna outside. Antenna was already in the house, hidden, ready to be used whenever somebody came and knew that one outlet is the entry to the antenna. So you can plug in and be connected and transmit to London, or received from London.

It seems like such a risk for your mother.

Huge. Huge risk.

Did she ever give you any explanation of why she saw the risk as worth it?

My mother, from as far as I can recall-- and then in reflection after the years-- was what you would call

today human rights activist. She very strongly believed in social justice, fairness. And she was a real patriot. She wanted to help the country.

We already had huge sacrifice by having our father not to be supporting family anymore, being tortured. And certain point we stopped to get letters from him. We believed that he died. So when he showed up in 1945, was a huge surprise for us, because there was no communication, no letter. We didn't expect at all. Basically, everybody-- we buried him and say, end. And then when he show up we were shocked.

Did you have an actual funeral for him at one point?

No. No, but it was the--

Just assumed.

Since we didn't know anything, was nobody-- nothing done. But it was like, everybody and our friends-- and at that time we were talking a little more about that. But still, till today I talk to several of my friends who survive, obviously. They didn't know that my father was arrested and in Auschwitz.

So back to the training that they did, what kind of training activities were they doing in the house?

So the training was to pass exams for the officers-- how to set up traps, how to put dynamite on the railroad tracks to explode at the time when German train with German soldiers or tanks or whatever going East, towards Eastern Front. Trains in our town were a very-- were narrow gauge. And it was going to Warsaw and then to another town, Grójec.

So it was relatively-- like, 20 miles one direction, 20 miles other direction. It was very local, not connected with the regular gauge, normal trains. But there were trains not far from us.

And this unit which was training there-- they were going different places, having different tasks, including-- I was witnessing the report which they had a task in nearby forest. There was a big opening which could have been turned into the grass field runway for planes with the big tires which they were able to land and takeoff in the middle of the night. So their task was on the-- it was a big forest.

On the outskirts of the forest these units were guarding where the Germans are nearby The other units were starting the bonfires on two ends, beginning and end of the runway. And these planes coming from either Italy or some other basis of Western--

Of the Allies?

Allies. And they were bringing goods, money, and people and taking off, also, people.

Wow.

This way-- I'm not sure whether it was that airfield. A gentleman whose name was Jan Karski who visited two concentration camps and then was sent as emissary to England and he visited President Roosevelt-- and he gave eye witness testimonials what's happening in the concentration camps. And Polish government in exile was begging both leaders, Churchill and Roosevelt, to bomb the tracks leading-- railroad tracks leading to concentration camps.

Unfortunately, it did not happen. And this is history. There are people who are studying this subject. I have my own opinion. But this is my own opinion and doesn't count. But the historians should explain why this information was ignored by both leaders.

So the people who were training in your house and were part of this underground movement-- can you go ahead and tell me some of those names of those people?

Yes. Yes. There was a father of my friend Witold Ptak. His name was-- first name-- no, I cannot recall it now.

It's 75 years--

Sure.

[LAUGHTER]

Well, who else?

--ago. But I knew them very, very well. I was in the houses, all of them, many times. And I absolutely knew them. I knew their voices. I could recognize when they were out of sight of the door.

So not every night, obviously-- I had to sleep. But at least one hour to two hours, sometimes, I was just not trying to not make noise on the other side of the door, and I was listening fascinating stories. And I knew so much. And I couldn't talk about that to anybody. I couldn't tell my mother that I knew because she would be terrified.

However, just before end of the war my-- the gentleman who was doing this training in conversation with my mother, they were talking about something about gun. And I said, yes, I know this was hidden there. They didn't know that I knew all these hiding places.

And I knew how to load the gun, handgun, and how to unload it. I knew how to apart, how to clean it. I knew everything because, out of boredom-- nobody was at home-- I went to that hiding place where they're talking about to check whether this gun is still there. I self-trained myself.

So after the war, when German army left certain amount of arms-- whenever you went they were besides mines in the fields, where-- a lot of arms here and there. Me and my friends were taking guns with ammunition. We went into the trenches. And there were nobody else there. And we were doing full shooting like on the shooting range. And we knew safely we could manage. And nobody train us. We were self-trained.

So this was after the war, though?

After the war, immediately. And a lot of young people died because farmers needed their fields. Before Soviet army came the people who were disarming mines in the fields-- they wanted to plow the fields. And the mines here and there and there. And you never know where. So they were training mine-- young people-- not training, paying young people who were foolish enough to go and disarm.

And the friend of mine two years-- three years older than me, brother of a good friend of mine-- I just talked to him a couple days ago-- he was learning how to disarm these mines. And similar, his friends and their friends were hired by farmers-- which was, I think, cruel, to let young people go into the fields. And they were, many of them, successful. Many of them survived. But some, unfortunately, made mistakes somewhere, or they didn't know. They stepped on a mine, which were all hidden under the ground. And they didn't have electronic equipment to detect it.

So your friend's brother died from--

Died. Died. And there was-- on the day where I was-- had appointment with him and his brother-- we're going together. And my mother locked me. And I didn't have key to open. We were living on the second floor. I didn't want to jump. So when my mother returned I was very angry that she did lock me, because I lost my ability to play.

And my mother says, yes, yes. I saw Jaszo. They carried him in the bed sheet. I saw him. And he was killed. But I was shocked. But I could've been one of them.

So I was lucky during the war, because every day when we're leaving home in the morning we were not 100% sure that we were going to be back that evening. Threat of being killed was very real. And I saw many, many incidences where people were killed either because they didn't stop when they were told to

stop, they had something hiding and they-- under body or something and they want to be discovered, or simply Gestapo didn't like or already knew this person or whatever, and they were looking for-- Gestapo was in my house many times. And it somehow happens that I cannot recall one instance where they mother-- my mother was at home and Gestapo came.

You were always alone?

Each time I was alone.

Wow.

I don't know how happened. They coming during the day, my mother was in school. But they several times they came afternoon, when my mother was not in school. Obviously, she didn't know about that. They never announced, obviously.

What I heard, only boo-boo-boo-boo on the steps, bang bang to the door, Gestapo, open. So I head to door, open. And they were walking around ransacking from all the drawers in the middle of the room and knocking the walls here and there. And they were asking me, tell us where these things are hidden, because they had some suspicion. But until they found they couldn't do anything about that. And I knew where things are hidden. However, I never blink my eye.

Were they speaking to you in Polish or were they speaking--

Sometime in German exclusively. And I knew German to that extent. I learn from German soldiers on the streets of Góra Kalwaria. And my mother knew some German. So she taught me some basics. It was a survival game. You need to knew how to communicate.

And they knew a little Polish, including some of them, especially the regular soldiers of Wermacht-- they were from Silesian region of Poland. They signed so-called Volks list, which is they had some ancestors of German origin. They spoke German at home. And how do you call it? Some of them very-- I wouldn't say what's the proportion, I don't know. But there were volunteers. But most of them, they were-- how do you call it? Inscripts?

Oh, they were drafted into it?

They were drafted.

They were forced-- well, not forced, but--

Yeah. I mean, they were obligated.

Yeah, obligated.

They didn't have a choice. So they spoke quite good Polish. Some of them, they are fluent in Polish. And those, we communicated first. So first words which I learned were mostly curses. I could-- I was able to curse in German for several minutes. That's my first encounter with German.

So after the Gestapo left and your mother came home, I imagine you told her about it.

Of course.

How would she react? What was--

She was shocked each time. But what she was able to do? There's no-- several people ask me, how come that your mother was not arrested? And I tell you why.

Underground movement, which I think it's the main explanation-- a lot of institutions which were-- had

German names and had to do with the Polish population. We had to do with rations. Food was available with coupons. You were getting coupons-- so many kilograms of sugar per month or per week, and one loaf of bread for week per head.

These organizations were-- had employees which are of Polish origin. And many-- I wouldn't say majority, but some of these positions were infiltrated by Polish underground movement, people who secretly work for the Polish underground movement. And they would bring information.

And early enough, my mother was informed there is an opportunity to get document to do the function which was collecting weather, like rain, snow amount, observation of the sky-- when the clouds, how low, when sun. And she got a book written in German columns. And every day at certain hours you had to fill, sometime in German-- simple words. I don't remember now. And then numbers-- hours and the amount, how many centimeters of rain that night was and so on.

And this information was collected by meteorological services, German, which were used by German Luftwaffe, German military, airforce. That gave my mother an ausweis, a document which we'd call an ID card today, with the picture all in German. And that, whenever she was traveling between Góra Kalwaria and Warsaw-- and she was traveling sometimes to take big round yellow cheese which was-- she was getting at very low price. And she was selling it in Warsaw at a certain place. Sometime that cheese had, inside, underground documents.

Really?

And my mother was having the suitcase. She was very fashionably dressed, had perfumes. She knew quite well German. And she was traveling. And she recalls one specific case when she was standing on the tramway stop. Tramway came.

One section of the tramway, nur für Deutsche-- German. Was German officer seeing a lady who's trying to lift the suitcase. So he helped her to enter Polish section, put her-- that luggage on the shelf, above the head, and then went to nur für Deutsche section. He did not realize that he's lifting underground army's literature hidden in the cheese inside.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah. Wow. I bet that made your mother very nervous.

That's the life. Oh, yes. But she-- when it happens to you once or twice you become conditioned and you become less sensitive-- which doesn't mean that in my kind-- although, as I mentioned at the beginning, children are maturing during the war much faster than you ever imagined. And adults don't realize how capable and knowledgeable-- children are a sponge. They listen.

They might not have the answers, but they know what's going on beyond their expected maturity level. So I was nine or 10-- 10 at the end of the war. But I was 15, 16 if comes to the survival skills and associating-- judging what's happening, whether it's dangerous situation or not, whether my life is in jeopardy, or how to read what eyes don't see, so to speak.

There were no newspapers, no radio. Journalists were communicating with Polish population by hanging two-language posters explaining, such and such a day, new regulations. You were allowed to do that. But mostly was not what you were-- what was forbidden. And that was the way. And there was no excuse of not knowing. You had to know it. So you had to read it, because your life depended on that-- what's on the poster.

So we haven't talked about the deportation of the Jews from your town yet. Do you have any memories of that?

On the day with deportation, it was taking place-- I saw the pictures taken by father of my friend. And his name is Adam Marchocki. And if possible I would like him to be-- I will recommend him to be interviewed by

somebody from Holocaust Museum because he's very knowledgeable.

His father-- about this period his house was also facing the wall. He is the same age as I am. His father was arrested in Góra Kalwaria. His father was a teacher and was sent to Auschwitz also, as well as another teacher, Mr. Piekarniak. Who was arrested in Góra Kalwaria and sent to Auschwitz. So those are people whom I knew well. And they were both teachers.

Do you know what they were arrested for?

Suspicion of being involved in underground movement, both of them. And they were. I mean, especially one. Another one--

Which one was especially so?

Piekarniak. Mr. Piekarniak.

How do you spell his last name?

P-I-E-K-A-R-N-I-A-K. Piekarniak. Oh, forgot his first name now. There was a whole family, but I cannot recall it.

Did he survive?

He survived. Both survived.

So Adam's father was also sent to Auschwitz?

Auschwitz, yeah.

And what was his last name?

Marchocki. M-A-R-C-H-O-C-K-I, Marchocki.

Do you remember his father's name? First name?

Edward

Edward?

Edward. Adam's father was Edward Marchocki. And so--

So Adam took pictures during the deportation?

No, Edward.

Edward did.

Edward. Edward. And these pictures are in the book which I couldn't find just before. I wanted to bring that book to show you, but I can't-- I have at home, definitely, 100%. I didn't lend it to anybody.

So you saw the pictures, but you weren't present for-- you didn't actually see the deportation?

Not on the day, because there was two days.

Two days.

A lot of people went to the station because they knew somebody or there was some relationships. People--

you know. Most of the population, although there was Hasidic Judaism mostly, but not all the Hasidic Jews in Poland. There were some like his father's, Mr. Price's father parents-- they were of the-- they went to synagogue a few times a year. They were--

Assimilated.

They assimilated partially. There's some people one leg in one world, another leg another world. And for them it was easier to survive, because they knew how to hide. This one didn't have Semitic features. He could-- got false documents. He could mingle and nobody would know it until some Germans-- German would do what they were doing, taking a man on the side and asking him to drop his pants. That was a--

To see if he was circumcised.

Yeah. Because non-Jews were not circumcised in Poland. There was exception and there was a rule. And that, Germans-- for them it was last test. But sometime was not sufficient.

There are all kinds of the relationships. German, to survive in Poland locally, they had to somehow relate. They couldn't be just shooting left and right. They needed food. They needed labor. The ghetto itself had assignments.

The Jewish authorities, Judenrat, authorities had assignments. So many people they need for work. Every day different people. Sometimes people work two, three times a week. Sometimes was paid a little bit. Others were not paid. All varied thing. But assignment was they needed, so for road work, for some other repairs, for some help with bringing food here or there. Less with food, because with food people would be stealing food.

So they tried to separate food from people. But they didn't have enough people of their own. Soldiers had tasks in the army or they went to the front, Eastern Front. They had to co-exist somehow.

So they tried to bribe people by promises. But as you know, all the-- most of the people who cooperated openly, or the Jewish police, which was guarding ghetto in Góra Kalwaria-- they were the last one to be packed in the last cart. And they were sent to Warsaw ghetto and then to Treblinka and other-- to gas chambers.

Germans didn't feel loyalty towards those who were cooperating with them. But at the time when they needed they found, always, people who were willing to cooperate. Those were the times.

It was interesting-- let me tell you just one thing.

Sure.

My mother had the observation that war time is the time when you have the opportunity to recognize who are good people, who are bad people. That among our acquaintances, friends, acquaintance of the acquaintances, people who we'd expect to be honest, to be fair, to be real human beings with empathy who were surprised. Those were expecting, they passed the exam, so to speak. And people whom we treated-- we thought that they are not worth to have respect, they became real heroes, really honest people who, so to speak, passed the exam of humanity.

And that was one of the major lessons which my mother and I learn, that the real people you recognize when the real test, real need comes in life, that people have different [NON-ENGLISH], different layers. And you really, to know the essence of a human person-- it's to remove all these layers first. And the war is the time when real test for the characters of the people.

So in 1943, during the Warsaw Ghetto-- before the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, I was in Warsaw several times. My mother was coming, doing some trading and visiting friends. We have some friends in Warsaw. And on several occasions my mother took me and we walk along the walls of the ghetto.

It was a section-- I forgot the name of the street, but I could reconstruct it-- where the cobblestone pavement of the street, sidewalk on outside street paved. And then the wall of the ghetto was almost on the edge of the street, or a very narrow sidewalk. The wall on that section was-- had no windows. And you can see the signs where windows were removed and the holes were filled with the brick.

The walls were, I would say, about eight meters, eight yards, about, tall. I didn't see anybody on the top. There were barbed wires on the top. But at the bottom were-- once in a while there were a small, narrow windows which had iron bars densely installed that a person-- maybe cat could sneak in, but person couldn't.

But often, when we're in the same area, we saw children's hands sticking out outside through that window. And they were either-- they would see, quite often, people walking on the other side. And they were showing that, give me something. Give me something.

And not far from there was a stand with vegetables where you can buy carrots, onions, celery-- something which you can-- a person can eat raw. And on several occasions my mother, with as little money as we had, were buying a couple carrots. And I exclusively-- my mother was observing when the gendarmes were walking their backs towards back another one. So it means they're walking away.

Opposite.

And they were not-- opposite direction. And they were not looking at us, being on the sidewalk on the other side of the street. And we are throwing these carrots. At these kids were grabbing them and eating them.

You can see that they were very hungry. And every piece of carrot was consumed almost on spot. You can see how it was appreciated. So my mother-- I think she did it for-- because she could throw it ourself, but she was giving it to me to teach me, be empathetic and help other children-- children helping children. There was-- on several occasions I remember that we're doing.

And also, by being in Warsaw we're standing on the tram stop. It was a raised area. And in one particular place there was ulica Puławska and there was tramway place when they were-- like a hangar, where there were-- several trains were ready to-- they were stored there temporarily, and they were-- before they got on their routine trip.

And this particular day, afternoon-- sunny day-- a truck comes. And German soldiers come from the cabin, and the truck is covered and full of the prisoners. And they commanding them to get out. They putting them against the wall. And one, with the machine gun, kills the entire row.

And other prisoners are ask-- another truck comes and asked to take this body with hands and legs-- one person holding hands, another-- to throw them on that truck. And they were taking them away. After they left we couldn't-- we were encircled by the police so we couldn't go.

I remember some of the women were putting their hands on children's eyes, not letting them to see it. But kids, even if they-- they always between the fingers, or they managed to see it. There's no way.

Did your mother try to do that? Did she cover your eyes?

She didn't encourage me, but she was explaining that. And strangely enough, these people, as sometime was happening, they were not raising-- they were not shouting. They knew they were being killed, but they didn't-- they didn't shout [POLISH], let's leave Poland free, or something like that they were shouting in Polish.

That particular group-- and there were a couple trucks came. And I don't-- didn't count them, but they must have been several dozen people killed this way. Mostly men were killed.

Do you think they were-- were they Pole-- were they non-Jewish or Jewish?

I have no idea.

No idea.

I have no idea, because nobody to ask, nobody to tell. Who knows? I didn't see David's stars on there. I would suspect they were non-Jews, rather. But I have no idea.

And after all of that show, which was done purposely by Germans to scare people, to make demonstration-- because they could take these people and kill them next to cemetery and bury them. They did it in public places purposely to spread fear, to spread the-- to tell people, watch it, because if you don't behave you will be killed as they are. That was the message which they wanted to send.

And so it was interesting reaction of the people-- of the people who were watching that. Once-- because we were very close. We were, I would say, less than 100 yards from that, really, because not always every of these prisoners were killed on spot. Sometime they were moving. So Germans were still walking around, and they were shooting in their head here and there from the handgun.

Once that show ended the trucks went and the police freed us to-- because trams were not moving, traffic was stopped for that execution time. There was, I don't know, maybe 20 minutes, something like that it lasted. Then they restored the traffic.

And then people were going to the execution place. And the walls were full of blood. Blood was in the street curb where the rain normally goes. How do you call it? The rain--

The drains.

Drain. So and their behavior-- the people, these who are watching were behaving. Some people were laying down, some people crying. Some people were touching and kissing these places. It's like holy places. It was amazing. But I remember, seems like that in spite of being eight, nine, 10 years old-- basically nine, because 10 years old was already-- war is over.

Do you remember talking about it with your mother? And does she have any--

It was so shocking for her. She saw it. She didn't ask me what I saw because I was next to her. And she tried to screen me. But I saw. I saw everything. And I was like hypnotized. I didn't know when it started and when it ended. I don't know what hour it was. I was just--

In shock.

Shock. So the concept of PTSD-- we didn't know the acronyms. Nobody knew about what does it mean at that time. But for young people like myself these things-- you cannot forget it. And to the extent that-- I think it's not enough of studying and knowledge what tragic situations like the war, like the memories of human beings treated worse than animals are treated quite often have impact on the psyche of young people. And I would like to be advocate for some studies to be done what impact war makes on young people.

I know myself that after, when I go like I went today with my memories back to these awful, awful times I am shaken. I am shaken now. And I feel worn out. And I feel disturbed so much that crying wouldn't release that tension, will not be enough. That's why I not so easily return to these times and talk about that, because it just disturbs me so deeply that takes me longer time than to get back to my normal mental and psychic, so to speak--

Do you have ways of coping--

--state of mind.

--with it and getting back to a normal--

I did a lot in my life. I've never been in a psychiatrist's office-- not for that purpose. No need. But I did

practice a lot meditation, transcendental meditation, zen meditation. Till today, here, we have here zen meditation once a week.

But I did it every day, twice a day sometime, just to restore my senses, because it's deeply, deeply disturbing experience just to talk about that. This is not somebody's else story. It's not the movie which one saw. This was my life, my childhood, which I basically didn't have because I didn't have normal play.

Yes, we did try during the war sports. I was very achieved 100 meter dash runner, javelin champion and triple jump and long jump and high jump and-- were my specialties. Yes, sports help a lot. But still didn't-- I don't know what would be if was not that spot. I don't know if I had to be just with my thoughts. So yes, I did-- I recognize the importance of physical movement, being in the nature, and so on.

And today I'm struggling with my memories. So it's not easy experience. Not easy to talk about that. But I think it's important that other people of my age and even younger who still remember what similar experiences they had in their life-- that is passed to the next generation so wars will be forbidden by law. I'm smiling at this point. But people will fully realize the consequences of the war. It's not that only people die on spot, that people are buried, that people lose their members of their families, they are injured physically, but the injury-- the mental injuries, so to speak, which stays perhaps even more than one generation.

Do you think it's affected your son?

Somewhat. Somewhat. But I didn't talk details. And I hope that when he watches that he will understand me better, because a lot of things are difficult to express with words. Those are the personal experiences which people underwent.

And others who didn't haven't been in my shoes, haven't been there. They didn't have a fear of losing their lives, or their mothers or fathers, or their cousins, or their friends. I can see it. It's impossible to visualize. You can be empathetic, but it's a degree to which you can be empathetic. It's still somebody's else life. Is not your life. It's his life, her life.

And I think it's what Holocaust Museum is doing, saving for generation is so important, so important, because other places-- there is some central archives here and there. But that needs to be made available for as much as possible, especially younger generations. That's my hope. That's my hope.