

OK, before we begin, could you tell us your name and where you're from and your maiden name and some background?

OK. I was born in Poland, Ostrowiec, Poland. My name was Chaya Mitzmacher. And I was 14 years old when the war broke out. And I was with my family. We were seven children. I had three sisters and three brothers. Together was seven children. And I had two sets of grandparents and I had a lot of aunts and uncles, because my mother came from a family from 11 children. And my father was only three, but he was the only one there.

And so it was a very happy family, and my father inherited the business from his father, which it was a family business. And his father had it from his father. And I don't recall how many generations, but it was a very good business. We had textile and ready-to-wear. And my father and mother were very happy people, and we had a very nice life for Poland. You know, it was middle class and we lived very well. I went to school. I never had to worry about anything and I never had to go to work.

Tell us a little bit about your life when you were young, say five or six years old.

When I was a little girl-- like I told you, I come from a large family-- I felt like I was loved and I played, and I was never frightened for anything. And we come from an orthodox family, so religion was very important. And we used to get together, all the family, all the time. And I know I had a lot of friends and a lot of relatives and I was very happy.

Was all of your family from the same town?

All the family was-- I don't know where they were from, but they lived there. My mother-- pardon me?

Which town was it again?

Ostrowiec, Poland. It wasn't far away from Warsaw. And like I told you, I had two sets of grandparents. And one grandfather was dead by the time I remember. So the grandmother was living with us. And then the other set of my father's father and mother had a house. And then I remember-- I don't remember how old I was, but I was quite young, because this was the first dead person I saw-- my grandmother died, and there was this funeral and everything.

And then my grandfather had this big house, so he did not want to move in to us, so we moved into his house. And we all lived together, and a very happy family. We had this business. I had my oldest brother, and I had one sister who already was married way before the war, and they worked in that business, too. So it was a family business until the war broke out.

What was it like growing up Jewish?

Pardon me?

What was it like growing up Jewish?

It was a way of life. We were never deprived about Christmas. I mean, we lived in a Gentile city. And Saturday in Europe, they had six-day school. Saturday, school was on. The Jewish kids did not attend school Saturday. So we used to go to the Gentile friends to get the lesson, whatever they were teaching, so we could do homework.

And I used to go to their houses all the time. And I knew that I'm not supposed to eat there or anything, and I did what I was told. I wasn't deprived. It didn't hurt me and I never missed-- if I wanted to see a Christmas tree, I went to a friend. And I never felt bad that we don't celebrate Christmas and that we don't have a Christmas tree. I attended a Jewish school after school.

And it's a matter of fact that they had, in the school, they had their religious teacher for the Jewish children and they had a priest for the Catholic children, for the Gentiles. And we went to our hour of religion and they went to theirs. And of course, it wasn't easy to grow up with some Gentiles, because they were always making fun.

But it didn't bother me. I don't remember being bothered by that because I was very secure and I had a nice family. And I guess we took it for granted that the antisemites-- or my father must have taken it for granted. If not, he would have not stayed there, because he had a brother and he had a sister. There only were three children, and they were living in Canada.

Because see, in Poland, the Jewish people did not want to go to the army because they had to eat non-kosher. And so they used to punish themselves to be underweight and stuff like this so the army wouldn't take them. But since my father already was in the army, and he remained there in that business, I guess. And his brother, who went to Canada, did not want to go to the army, so he went to Toronto, Canada.

Do you remember when your father went into the army?

No. No.

About how old were you?

How old I was when my father was in the army? He probably wasn't married yet. You know, you have to be 21, I guess, to the army. Or maybe he was married and I wasn't even born because I was number five child, see? I was the fifth child. I don't remember, but my father and my grandfather used to be in the First World War with the Kazakhs. He used to tell us stories about that all the time.

My grandfather was a very strong man because I know he used to-- he had all his teeth. In Europe, we used to drink tea with lumps of sugar, and he used to take a piece of sugar, and we used to make fun that grandfather so healthy. And he was alive until the Germans came in, and he just was old-fashioned. And when they came to confiscate all those things, he just resented it, and they killed him.

Can you remember what it was like just before the Germans came, just before the war started?

Just before the Germans came, I mean, people were talking about Hitler a lot. But they didn't know what he is doing. Just the war broke out in '39, right?

And how old were you at the end of 1939?

When the war broke out, I was 14 years old.

Yeah, 14. OK.

And they were talking. But you know, when you're that young, what do you care? I mean, all I know, when the day when the war broke out, I saw some policemen. There were policemen. There were soldiers who took out just a plain gun, and when they saw those aeroplanes, the German aeroplanes flying our little city, they were shooting with a gun. This much I remember.

And then they were laughing, like my father was laughing, look at the Poles. They don't even have anything to fight with. And I was happy that I wouldn't have to go to school. I remember that, that all my friends, oh, we won't have to go to school. You know what I mean? And then when the war broke out, it didn't take long for the Germans to come to my city, I mean to Poland. It just took them a few days, I believe, to conquer all Poland.

Poland was the first country. The war broke out with Poland, Germany and Poland, correct? And Poland was the first country that they conquered, and maybe in a week. And when the Germans came in to our city, I mean, of course my father and everybody, I guess they were nervous, but I didn't pay any attention. Because like I told you, my father thought that the Germans are better than the Poles.

Tell us a little bit about that.

He used to say that they were very nice, civilized people, and he knew them from the army, and they were nice. And a lot of other people used to say, you must not pray for a new king. But the old one is it could get worse, but you know. And then when the Germans came in-- like they came in today and we were watching all the tanks and everything. They were parking everything in the city. And the following day, they would have-- see, there were no television to say the news.

So they used to put these, like they do in Europe, posters in all the Jewish neighborhoods right away. And they said they put a curfew. You could get out so many hours a day. I don't remember what the hours was. And anybody who's not going to obey is going to be killed. And people didn't take them serious and they were killed. And we saw that something is very wrong immediately.

We were still living in the houses and we still had the business, and of course every day was a different order. Like today you can't go in this hour, and the next day you can't go out of the city. There were different orders every single day. And all our clientele were all Gentiles. We used to give a lot of merchandise to pay out for payments. And I had brothers who used to go and collect, and they no longer could go because they were afraid.

So I remember at one time, I looked like Gentile because I had blonde hair and braces and I was riding a bicycle. And I used to go to some Gentiles, and they would give me food to take home and some money. And I did this for a nice few weeks, until this was stopped, too. My parents were afraid for me to go.

But every day they had a different order, not to do this or not to do this, until it got very bad. This was in '39, and then the war went on steady. In Poland, the war was finished, but we had all kinds of different orders because they knew what they wanted to do with everybody. They had a system, but we didn't know that.

So we still did some business and everything. And the people who didn't have a business-- like my mother's sisters, they were workers. They really didn't have enough food or enough nothing, because they confiscated a lot. And then, little by little, they came in to the Jewish businesses to confiscate the business. And they did come in to our house to take all the merchandise out. That's why my grandfather did not let them, and so they killed him.

Do you remember that?

Yes. Yes. He was not a young man, my grandfather, but like I told you, he was very healthy. He could have lived till 100. He was maybe-- he wasn't old like they're old now, maybe in the 70s. And they killed him, and there was a funeral and everything. It was still a funeral and the cemetery, I remember.

Then they took all the merchandise out, and things got bad. They got from worse to worse. Then there was one order that Jewish people cannot wear fur coats. Whoever has a fur coat has to deliver it here and here in a special office, all the fur coats. And if we're going to catch you, we're going to kill you. So you had to give this up.

And little by little, you gave everything up until they came-- they chased out from other cities into our city. It was a Jewish committee, like a Jewish community center. We had this in every city. And when the Jewish people, they were chased out-- like from Mike Jacobs, from his town. He was from Konin. They came to our city. And so naturally, the Jewish people used to receive them. And we had nothing, but whatever we had, we shared. And we went to help them and everything. And then when they accumulated enough people, that's when they did this.

But it took from 19-- I don't remember which month. The war broke out like maybe in September, I think. Do you all know when? Something like that because it was the Jewish holidays, I remember. And then '40 and '41 is when they chased every-- and then we still existed and we were with the family. I was with the family, my brothers. And they used to do-- the Germans would--

Since all the German men were in the army and the ladies, he wanted to treat them well. They shouldn't have to do domestic work. They used to grab children in the street, in every city in Poland, and would send them to Germany for domestic work. I never went out. But they used to grab and they would send them. Mainly they didn't look for so many

Jewish people, but they took the Poles.

Oh, something else I forgot to tell you. And when they invaded my hometown, what they did is they took all the polish intelligentsia, like the lawyers and the doctors and all this, and they made the-- what do you do before you hang people?

Gallows?

Yeah. You know, to hang them. And they wanted all the Jewish people to come out. This was maybe one week after they invaded the hometown. They took all the Jewish people, we should stay and watch them. And they put them maybe-- I don't remember how many, 40 people or 30 some-odd people-- they hung them, the Poles, and we should see that.

When they grabbed these people to Germany-- I don't think they grabbed them as Jews. The Poles they did, but they didn't want Jewish people there. They had enough, their own, you know. So that's what they did, until one day, there was this poster, that tomorrow, 4 o'clock in the morning, you should all be in this and this place, and carry whatever you can, and dress up, and that's it. They never said where we're going.

Do you remember about when this was?

When this was? This was also like-- it wasn't winter yet, so it must have been in the fall.

And this was in 1941?

'41.

OK.

Mike remembers better dates. Like I told you, none of my members were missing, even though one of my brothers, they grabbed him to work one day and they beat him up. But they let him go. But they all were still alive. After me, I had another brother and another little sister. They all were alive, and we all went out together that one morning on the square to be sent someplace that nobody knew where.

And I walked with my father and with my mother and with my sisters. Like I told you, it was like a lot of excitement and pressure. And when we walked out, whatever we could carry. So what my father did, my father called the children. And we had some possessions. I understood this better later when I grew up. Like when my father knew that there was going to be a war, he used to sell merchandise and buy some gold coins or some jewelry, diamonds and stuff.

And before we were chased out, he told the children-- he put it all in a bottle and he put it in the basement. He dig the hole and put it in the basement. And he said, whoever is going to survive whatever, that's where it is, the rest of the possession. And so we knew that.

And then, like I told you, we walked out. And when we walked out, there were these Nazis. They really were SS. And they wore these white gloves with canes, little canes. And they just say, you go here. You go here. You go this. Like this, you see? And so it was terrible because the square was not that big and there were lots of people. And of course, people didn't know how long this is going to take, so they used to hide in basements and attics, and a lot went out in the square.

And we stayed in one place, and we saw all these people pushed into these wagons. And religious ladies wore these wigs, because a religious person has to wear a wig, an orthodox person. So they wear, and they were all taken off. And the screaming from the children was unbelievable, unbelievable. I saw children laying that mothers didn't know what to do, little infants and these little pillows, tied down to the pillow and was laying in the street, just like that, crying.

And it was just like a horror, screams and yelling something terrible, because it was dark when we walked out, and it was in the fall. It must have been 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and it lasted till maybe 10, 11 o'clock at night, all this.

And they kept on sending one wagon after the other, one wagon after the other.

And where I stayed there, then another Nazi came. And he said he needed 11 girls to work. OK. Believe me, I didn't push myself. I didn't know. I stood there. So there was so many. And so they counted 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and I was the 11th. You go here. You go there. I mean, you didn't know where you were going. And I remained again, and these others went, because evidently, they had too many and they didn't want so many. So they said, you go here and you go there. And I still remained there.

And then after the whole day, this blood in the street and the belongings from people and everything, it was just terrible. I mean just terrible. And it was, all of a sudden, very quiet because there was nobody there except this group that we remained.

Did you see your parents and your family go away?

No. No. I was staying in a place where I just saw people pushed in and it was very hard for me to see because they probably had different places where they put different people. I didn't. I saw my brother, one brother, staying near me. And this brother had a child who was maybe two years old. And I was happy to see him.

And all of a sudden, he says, I'm going to look for my wife and child. And I never saw him anymore. He went to look for his wife. He wanted, you know. And I have never seen him. And then I didn't see anybody from my family anymore.

And after that evening, when it was dark already, and like I told you, all these toupees laying in the street and a lot of blood because they would kill a lot, probably who resisted. And they took us, marching to this community center. It was called the Jewish comitat. They took us in there. When they took us in there, everybody was crying so bad, and it was just a terrible experience, the worst. Like all of a sudden, you have a family and everything and you live by yourself.

And then you see-- I don't remember how many people remain, but it didn't take long. And people knew about it, the people who hid in the basements or in the attics. And there were more people. They came there for some reason. Now, you also know that before that, there were Jewish policemen.

The Germans did it. They made sure that there was a Jewish comitat, which it was like a community center. And when they needed somebody to kill or to do this, they said to them, you have to give me so many people to work, so many people to kill. And they had to take care of it. And not that they worked for the Germans. They didn't. But they had no other choice.

So there were a lot of Jewish policemen that they helped, also. When they chased us out, they helped. And then when we went to this comitat that night, the following morning, you see the policemen who remained there and a few people who remained. They had to clean out all the houses, all the possessions, to bring it to a place, to the Germans.

So when I got myself in this Jewish community center, I met one man, who was my father's friend, and he knew me since I was a little girl. And he was a policeman. And he said to me that I'm going to help you do something, he said. I know you have to go. It would be advisable. A lot of people made passports, false passports, like Swiss passports. They were phony, but they for money.

So this father's friend said that he was going to help me do something, and I said fine. But in the meantime, the following day, they grabbed us to work, see, to clean up all these possessions and stuff. Like I told you, we had in my hometown factories from iron and from coal, and that's where they took us to work also.

In the morning, they took us to work. In the evening, they brought us back in this comitat, and there were Germans watching it, and also Jewish policemen. And I don't remember how long this lasts, but I remember one day that I was sick. I had a toothache. I had such a toothache that I just couldn't go to work. So I went to my father's friend. He was a policeman. I said, what should I do? My tooth is killing me and I need to go to a dentist.

And what they did-- I needed some fillings, and they pulled out a tooth from one side and a tooth from the other side,

because they would not do fillings for us. They just pulled it out. At the time, believe me, I didn't care, but later on I did, because you take good teeth and you pull out.

Well anyway, I stood there in this comitat-- it wasn't a ghetto. They called it a Jewish comitat. That's what they called it. I don't know how long it lasted. More people came to it from the basements, from what I told you. They didn't know how long it's going to take. How long can you lay in a basement? Two days, three days? You have to get out.

So when they get out, they were lucky that-- a lot of them went out and they were shot from Germans. And a lot of them, if the Jewish policemen saw them, they make-believe they take him to work, see, and they took him to this comitat. And then we stayed there for a while, and from there, again, they cleaned out. And again, I remained there.

During these days, did you think you were going to die? What were you feeling?

Well, my feeling was that I guess I had no feelings. I was crying. I was very, very angry that I lost all my family. I didn't know I'm going to die, but I knew that they're going to take me also. Yeah. See, the reason I knew where they took him is because when they took those transports, two of them jumped down a train and they came to that. And when they came, they told us how they got there.

They didn't know the name of the place, but they said that's a place where they tell people to get undressed and they tell them to take showers, and then they put them into the gas chambers. That was the first time we heard something like that, I mean, that I heard something like that. Maybe the older people knew about it, but I didn't.

And then I just could not believe it. I didn't want to believe it, I guess. I says, no. My parents did not go there. And then more people came and they told us stories. It was horrible. Well, but it didn't take long what they were going to do with these few people. Maybe there was 200, I don't remember how many.

As I told you, there were factories. They were going to put us in a ghetto there near the factory, just to go to work and live there. And then it would be very bad because they gave us very little food, some soup and something, that you couldn't survive.

So this father's friend came, and he said that he knows other people who did it, and he's going to help me. And I told him that I have some money. I didn't know how much money there was in this, but my father hid. But I was the only one there left. So he took me, like make-believe I'm taking you to work. A policeman was allowed to take me to work, that's all. He wasn't allowed to take me any other place.

But we had work to do to clean out this possessions from the people. So he make-believe he took me to work. And I went down. It didn't take me long because it was still fresh. I saw my father's glasses and everything. And I just was hysterical. I picked up this little bottle and I broke it, and I just stick it in my, you know. And I gave it to my father's friend.

And he bought for me a birth certificate from a Catholic girl who lived in my hometown in Ostrowiec. And what they did is you buy this, and he had to pay off some people who work in a church for the stamp, you see, to put a stamp and put my picture. And when I had this birth certificate, I made an identification card. And my name was changed. My father's name, and everything. There was another two girls who did that. And he arranged for us--

What was your name changed to?

Zosia Kasprzyk

OK.

I had to remember that all the time, and my father's name, my mother's name. I still have that birth certificate. But what happened is when you stayed there in this little ghetto, in this comitat, Germans watched, and also policemen, Jewish policemen. And this man made arrangements with other Polish for us three girls. I knew the other ones, but one was a

little younger and one was a little older than me-- that we three of us had these birth certificates and we were going to live with some Gentile people in Warsaw. And he was going to arrange this for us.

Now, to live in a hometown, you see, we only had Poles and Jews. And the Polish people, as much Gentile one looked, but they knew a way that there was-- I don't know how much you could recognize Jewish people in this country, but somehow when you grow up here, you grow up with all kinds of different nationalities, and every day it was just Jews and Poles. And we dressed differently and we were just acting differently, too.

And they had to take us out from that little comitat to go to Warsaw. He made all the arrangements, and we had to pay so much a month by these Gentiles to stay there and to give us their some meals and to wait. And who knew how long it's going to take? We didn't know how long it's going to take.

And one night, when there was closer already to take us to these factories and stay there-- that was called like a ghetto there, to make the ghetto-- he knew-- because he was a policeman, he had news. And he knew this is close to that time. So that's when the time should come, before we go there, because from there, nobody could go away no more. From this comitat it was easier.

So he made the arrangements. And one day, he took us out from this ghetto. We already had all the papers. And we did not wear no more that Jewish band that we had to wear. And we're sitting in a train going from Ostrowiec to Warsaw. And there were the two girls with us, and then we saw another one that we didn't know about it. We knew she was Jewish, too. And there was all Gentiles going in this train, and we were so frightened. I mean, every minute, I thought, oh, somebody's going to kill me.

And we finally got to Warsaw. Some Gentile waited for us, picked us up, and took us. It wasn't really in Warsaw. In Warsaw, the Poles were very, what do you call, blackmailers. When they saw a face that they looked like Jewish, even though they weren't Jewish, they said, hey. If you have money, you have something. If not, we're going to take you there, too. It was called Skarzysko Street. This was the Germans to say, you're Jewish, and that's all you had to do.

Well, it was like maybe 50 miles, in a little city, away from Warsaw. It was a very nice place. And we went to this house and we stayed there in a basement, and she gave us to eat. And we were all dressed, like in case somebody comes that we just came for something, that she doesn't know who we were. So she didn't want to be jeopardized because they were not allowed to hide Jews. But whoever wanted could have done something. Anyway, we stayed there for, I don't know, a nice few months, but a few months.

Do you remember about when this was? Was this still in '41 or was this probably about '42?

No, no, no. Like past '41. Maybe in the middle of '41. Because I came to in May. In May I already was in Germany. So '41. October, November, December. Maybe in January of '41. And then maybe before January, because we came-- it was before, maybe in November.

OK, that's fine.

And the Warsaw ghetto, there was a ghetto in Warsaw. And we saw the ghetto, but from the outside. We stayed with those Gentile people. And then this lady was afraid to keep three of them, so we separated. I was sent to a lady in Warsaw. I remember her name was Barecka She was a single woman. She had no husband. And I stayed there, also dressed up with a coat in case I have to run.

And when I stayed there with her, I had lost already these two other friends. And this man who took us there, she said that this man made the arrangements, but I didn't see this man anymore. And I told her that I have only money for one more month to pay, because we used to pay her money for that.

And there was terrible in the streets. I mean, the blackmail was so bad, anybody who looked suspicious, you know. This woman, this Polish woman, told me, she says, I know you don't have any more money. She says, I can keep you, but I want to tell you, I'm going to help you what to do. If you want to listen to me, maybe you'll survive. And I says, what

should I do? Are you going to keep me without money? She says, no. I was ready to jump out the window there because there was such a horror on the streets, looking for Jews everywhere.

So she said that she already did this to other Jewish people. Like I told you before, there were two kinds of people the Germans needed for domestic work to take him to Germany. There were one who they grabbed in the street and they couldn't care less who they are. The second was offices, voluntarily. If you want to come to Germany to work, we're going to give you a job. We're going to pay you good. You come with us.

So she suggested that I go to an office like that, since I have my birth certificate and my identification card, and I should never say nothing else but that's who I am, and go as a volunteer to Germany to work. And that, she says, is your best bet to survive. I mean, she did tell me that. And I says, me by myself, what if somebody recognizes me? Well, what she did is she took me there to that office.

And I went into that office and I told her, I might never walk out, because in this office, there were Germans. There were also Polish people working. And I wasn't as much afraid for the Germans, that they're going to recognize me, as I was afraid for the Poles. And they were very polite. They tell you to sit down. They gave you a catalog, where you want to go and what you want to do. And I couldn't care less what I'm going to do and where I'm going to go. And I didn't want to look suspicious, too nervous. And she gave me some tips, and she waited for me outside. And I says, well, if you see I'm not coming out, I says, don't wait too long. I might never come out.

Lucky enough, I mean, they asked me the questions. I just said the questions. I had my papers in order. And they say, you want to go to Stuttgart? I says, fine, as a maid. And they told me when to come to a special place, where they take all these people and they group them there, and when they have enough they send them to Germany for domestic work.

So I came out and I told this to this lady, to Mrs. Barecka, and she was happy that I'm still alive. And I went back to her house and she no longer wanted to keep me there. She told me to go to this place. And I was afraid to go to this place because this place-- well, I'll explain you again. See, people who they grabbed in the streets, the Polish people, they couldn't help it. They could have come from the finest families, but if they were grabbed, they went.

But people who go as a volunteer from a nice family, young kids, parents would not allow to let them go. So they had to be very low class of kids who the parents didn't care, prostitutes or who knows? They went for a good time.

And this lady told me this herself. It makes sense. Like from a good family, which father would let their 14- or 15-year-old daughter go away to the Germans? This is the enemy, the Germans, correct? If they grabbed them, it's a different story, but this was voluntarily. So they accumulated people like this, voluntarily, and sometimes you had to stay there a week until they had enough people.

Well, I took a few things, what I had, the belongings, and I went to this place. And when I got in there, I saw some faces that I recognized that they were Jewish, but we wouldn't dare to talk to each other. We tried to keep away from each other. I mean, when they looked at me and I looked at them, we knew who we were, but we sure were afraid.

And of course, the real Polish people, who went voluntarily, they took-- what do you call it? Like to go home, to go see, to go out-- a pass. They took a pass. They could go out for the day and come back. They were voluntarily. I had no place where to go, and so I was staying there, and it was kind of suspicious. Some Polish girls said, hey, come out. Don't you want to go about the town? I wanted to go about the town. I was afraid. So I says, well, no. I just want to wait here, and stuff like that.

Then I went and I called up this woman, and I told her that everybody is leaving and they're coming back. I says, it would be nice if you could come to see me, not to look so suspicious that nobody comes there. I don't think she came. She didn't come. I stayed there, and we waited for everybody to get there.

And the day we left, we went by trains. We were all standing, lined out. And from that line, there were lots of people. I can't recall how many. When you looked at the faces, you could have seen-- there were Germans looking through everything-- you could have see who was Jewish, because they all got scared. And two of them they picked out. We



didn't know at the time. They didn't say who they were, but we knew that there were two Jewish people they took out. They looked very Jewish and very suspicious probably. So they took them out from the lines.

And we couldn't wait to get into that train. And when we went into the train, I went to the bathroom, and I was so scared for all these Polish people. I wasn't so scared for the Germans because the Germans couldn't recognize-- if I would wear nothing here, I looked like a German. But in the train, I saw a few people who looked really very Jewish. And we would not talk to each other. There were four people. They went out from the bathroom. They went to the bathroom. Most of the time we spent in the bathroom because we were afraid. We got to Germany, to Stuttgart.

And when you come, even voluntarily, you have to go through an office. It's like when they give out work, what do you call these offices? Where you go here-- an employment. OK, they employment offices. And they gave out the people for positions. Probably the restaurants or whoever wanted a maid made an application there. And when they got us they told us where to go.

So they sent me Fellbach. It wasn't far from Stuttgart. It was just maybe 20 minutes, a suburb of Stuttgart. They sent me there, which, when I got there, it was a restaurant in the house. There was already one Polish maid there, which I wasn't so happy about it. But when I got there, they gave me a room to share with this Polish girl. I mean, they gave us to eat and everything. And we worked. The work was like 6 o'clock in the morning. They knocked on the door and we got up and worked maybe till 10 o'clock at night.

And this was as Polish girls. Had nothing to do with being Jewish. And us Polish girls, that was the only people, the Polish and also Russians, because the Russians were still in the war with the Germans. The Russians had to wear "O-S-T," "ost." And the Polish had to wear a big P. All the other people-- they had people from all over Europe, wherever they invaded, and nobody else had to wear anything, except the Poles and the Russians.

And naturally, I was afraid to wear the P because why should I wear a P? If I go someplace, the landsman should see me to say hi. So I mean, the punishment was not that severe, if you didn't wear a P. If a cop saw you and he knew who you were, you paid some money. They paid us for that work, but very little. And they gave us three meals a day. We worked very hard.

During this time, did you think much about--

During this time I was very depressed. First of all, when I got to Germany, I did not know German good. I understood some words. Some are similar to Jewish, but not that much. So first of all, when they called me Sofia, I didn't respond because I had forgotten my name. So she had to call me a few times and she got angry. I says, I don't hear so good. I mean, you always have to look for an excuse to give. And then I got used to it, Sofia, and all the mother's name, the father's name, which they didn't have to ask me all the time, but you had to do it in the offices.

And this lady, the husband was a Nazi. He went to the meetings. He had three daughters. Two of them were Hitler-Jugend. They were young. One didn't go to meetings. I don't think she belonged to the party. She was by the register. But he had meetings and everything, and I worked there. And we had like a half a day off to clean the room and to wash our hair and stuff like that.

But what was the hardest for me there-- I didn't mind the work and I really didn't come for a good time, to go out. But this Polish girl who was there was not very nice, because like I told you, she just went for a good time. And she used to run around at night, and she would want me to go. And I told her, I can't go because I have to get up 6 o'clock in the morning and it's just too much for me. I says, I don't know how you could make it.

And I was afraid for this girl more than for anybody else, because she wasn't nice and I was afraid. At night when I was asleep, I shouldn't talk Jewish, that she should know. I mean, maybe she was suspicious, but maybe not. We used to kneel by the bed every night and just do the prayers. And I went with her to church, which she needed church like, you know. But I went with her to church. I went whenever we had a chance.

And one day-- and I worked there, and everything was nice. I cried a lot. I cried a lot. So she used to say to me, Sofia,

why are you crying? I says, because I miss my parents. See, on this birth certificate, it was like my mother was still alive but my father was dead. And that's why I want to help my mother, so I want to go to work to be able to send some money. That's why I want to go. They asked me, what's the reason you want to go to Germany? So I told them, I can't get a job here. Everything is bombed. And I need some money for my mother.

So they knew I had a mother. They knew I didn't have a father. When I cried, they used to ask me, why are you crying? I says, well, I miss my mother. So they say, Sofia, don't worry. When you work a year, we'll send you for a furlough. OK. But then I cried and it helped me. I cried a lot. I remember that.

But one day, this girl was really running around. And she says to me, you don't want to stay here. She says, let's run away from here. I mean, she was really a tough girl, that she didn't come to survive. She came for a good time. And she got tired of it, of the work. So she wanted to escape.

Now, when a Polish person escaped back to Poland, they were punished. They couldn't escape because they made a contract and they had to stay there. They signed. So she wasn't afraid and she wanted me to go with her. So I told her like this. I says, you know what? Why don't you go first? And then you'll see if you pass the border-- she was going to smuggle down the border.

She said, I have a brother who's going to wait for me and we'll make it. I says, you go first, and then let me know and then I'll come. I'll come later. She said, I don't have enough money. And I was afraid to be so nice to want to give them. I said, I'll help you. I'll give you some money and you'll give it back to me when I'll see you.

I just wanted to get rid of her so bad. And the boss knew that we were both from Poland, and she trusted me with all the keys. She knew that I was kind of different, because she saw me, that I didn't run around or anything.

During the war, they had also ration, these little coupons, for meat and for other things. When people came in the restaurant to eat, they had to give the coupons for so much meat. So this was valuable. And she used to let me take care of this, to put it in the books. And she trusted me. I knew she trusted me.

So then one day-- it was already maybe a year later, or maybe nine months later-- when this girl decided she's going to run. She had enough. And she ran away. At 6 o'clock, when they knocked on the door, I answered, and I was ready.

And she says to me, where is Steffi? I says, I don't know where Steffi is. I says, she goes out every night, and I don't know where she is. Oh, yeah, you know. You know where Steffi is. I says, no, I don't know where Steffi is. I says, I'm here. That's it. That's all I care. I says, I don't know where she is. She says, I'm going to call the police. You know where she is. I says, no, I don't know where she is.

Well, what she did is, you see, Oberschlesien used to belong to Poland, and then the Germans had it. And all these people from Oberschlesien became Nazis. They called them Volksdeutsche. I don't know whether you heard this. They became Germans. And there were a lot of them in Stuttgart, especially.

She called a guy. He was not a gestapo. He was a Volksdeutsche, and he was like a policeman. And he came to talk to me. So I says to him-- his name was Cebula, I remember. Cebula in polish is an onion, because they all were Poles but they became Germans.

And I says to him, Mr. Cebula, I'm sorry. I don't know where she is. I work. You ask this lady, I says. I came to work, and that's all I'm interested, is I want to work. You always had to say you want to work and you had to work, because that's the only survival. And that's all I care, and that's it. I don't know where she is. OK. He didn't do nothing to me. He left me alone.

I didn't hear anything, except maybe three or four days later, the boss came, this Nazi came. And he said that she's in jail. She ran away and the police took her in jail. I didn't know how true it was, but I was very happy. OK. Then she was looking for another maid because it's a hotel in a restaurant and she needed another maid. So I said to her, don't get so many Polish people. I says, take a Russian. Take from France. They had some France. They had from everywhere.

Well anyway, she took another girl that was from France. And she was very nice, this French girl. I don't know whether she was Jewish or not. It was very hard for me to tell, but she looked very nice and she behaved. And she was working with me, and everything went fine. This Mr. Cebula used to come there and drink with his boss and have dinner. And he always says to me, Sofia, how are you? He always-- fine, fine.

One day, Mr. Cebula-- you see, also, the Polish people in Germany, they had a choice, like I had to wear a P. This Cebula came and he says to me, you have a choice to become a German, a Volksdeutsche, like he is. And for this, he said, you get better treatment, more money. And I says, I'll think about it.

In the meantime, I worked and I behaved. And one day, when I kept on crying so much, the lady, the boss lady-- very few people got a furlough to go home. Believe me, you had to be outstandingly good. She came to me to say that she wants to give me a furlough for a week to go home to see my mother.

And I got cramps in my stomach because I didn't want to go nowhere. I had nothing nowhere. And I didn't know to say-- when you cried all the time and all of a sudden you say you don't want to go, you look suspicious. I had one friend in there, in that Fellbach, who I forgot to mention--

Fellbach, what's that?

Fellbach, that was a little city where I worked, away from Stuttgart. But while I was there all this time working, when we were off, we used to go to another restaurant. The reason I went to this restaurant is because I saw a girl there who I knew that she looked very Jewish, and the way she talked and everything. But we were afraid to tell each other that we're Jewish. What if she's not? Then our life is in jeopardy.

So I went there. It took me all this time while I was working with this Gentile girl to go and just look at her, and we just said some words to each other. And one day, we told each other that we're Jewish, because we were so sure. So whenever we wanted to cry together, we used to get together for a few minutes. She would come to my restaurant when she was off and I would go to hers.

And that day, when this Cebula came to tell me that I should become a German, so I says to him, Mr. Cebula, you are what you are. You can't become a German. I'm Polish. My mother was Polish. What do you mean your mother? You give me your address and I'm going to ask your mother. And you can't not give him the address. You know, you have to give him. But at that time he still left me alone. But now, because this lady came to tell me to go for a furlough and I was unhappy about that, too, so I went to my friend and I cried to her.

I says, look. I can't say I don't want to go. What should I do? What should I do? She says, you know what? Don't work so good. Maybe she'll get mad and she won't want to send you. So I figured that would be a good idea. So 6 o'clock, what it used to take me an hour would take me two hours, would take me three hours. I used to goof off and stuff. I never stole anything, but I used to goof off.

And it came to a point that she was very mad. And she says, what's the matter with you? Are you sick or something wrong? She says, I want to send you for a furlough. I'm so nice to you. And here you don't want to do the work anymore? I says, well, I'm doing the work. I guess I must be tired. She says, if you're going to keep on doing that, you can't go. You can't go home.

And it came to a point that one day, I came and she told me to do something. And I guess I must have been very nervous and stuff and I didn't want to do it. Oh, she wanted to take away my day off. And I says, I have to clean my house. I have to wash my hair. I have to wash my clothes. I need it off. She says, no, you're not going to have a day off because you're not working good. You could forget about your furlough. And she slugged me. She hit me. So when she hit me, I just hit her back. I just felt like she was a very heavy set woman. She had two very big-- and I slapped her like this.

And when I did that, she called this Mr. Cebula on me and he came. Before he asked me anything, he hit me, too. And I got up for my rights and I stood up for my rights. And I said, Mr. Cebula-- I talked to him in Polish. I says, why would

she want to hit me?

First of all, I came here as a volunteer. I'm working like a dog. It was very nice of her. I says, you ask her. She gives me the keys from everything. She gives me the stamps if I ever stole anything. And I says, I'm very conscientious. I says, and she wanted to take away the day and I couldn't wash my clothes and she hits me. He says, she could hit you but you must not hit her back. I says, why not? I says, why shouldn't I? Why should she hit me, for nothing?

Well anyway, what he did is he threw me in jail. He threw me in jail. And I remember I wore my uniform, and it was the first time I saw a jail. And I lay down on the floor and I went to sleep, because I was so tired that I couldn't care less. And I went to sleep and I stayed in jail, I don't remember, maybe three days.

And I said, he came. The same Cebula came to visit. And he said, are you ready to go to work? I says, no, I'm not going to go to work to her no more. I want another job. Now, you couldn't change your job, as a Polish person even. You had to go through the unemployment office.

I says, if you're going to give me another job, I'm going to go to work. Well anyway, he locked me back in, in jail. And then, believe it or not, I remember there was a little trial. There was a trial. They took me to trial-- why I did this, why I hit her.

OK, and so I went. I remember there was a little court, and the Germans were sitting there, and they asked me questions. I was frightened, still frightened for everybody at this point. But I kept on saying all my things. I says, I came here as a volunteer and I want to work and I'm working very hard, and this lady was nice. I says, she wanted to send me.

And I don't know why it took me longer to work, and she wanted to take away my day off. I just had to do my clothes and stuff, and she hit me and I hit her back. They gave me 42 days. It's called an [GERMAN]. It's like a delinquent camp. Not for Jews. It was for delinquents, you know, any kind who was a delinquent. I was a delinquent because what I--