

Anyway, Maria, we're happy that you could come today. Not everyone is willing to do this. And to start with, we would like you to state your married name, your single name, your family's names, your birthplace, and so on, and so forth.

OK. You want me to start now?

Yes, please.

OK. My married name is Segal-- S-E-G-A-L. And my first name is Maria, M-A-R-I-A. And I was née Polanowicz. Did you want me to spell that?

No, not necessary.

No, OK. I was born in in the Warsaw area in Poland. And I believe it was a small town called Okuniew. It was approximately, I don't know, three-four miles from Warsaw.

Did you have your family, your mother and father, their names? We would like to have their names.

Yes. My father's name was Leib. And my mother's name was Leah. And I had two brothers, older brothers. I had three sisters that were older and one that was younger. There were seven children altogether in the family.

It would be good to have their names on record too.

My oldest brother was Moishe. My-- he was the oldest of the family. And the second was [Josek. And I had-- my oldest sister was Nicha. And the next one was Elka. And Shandulka was the youngest. And then I was the second to the youngest.

Any of your sister and brothers alive today?

As far as I know, none of them are alive. If they're alive, it's a miracle they're somewhere around.

What was your childhood like? Did you go to public school long?

I lived in the small village of Okuniew outside of Warsaw. And as far as my recollection takes me, I had gone to first grade for a short period of time when the war started. And once the war started, Jews were not permitted to go to public school. So I did not go to school.

But we had a parochial school, a cheder, where my brothers and my sisters went. And though I was very young, I went to the cheder as well. And if I remember, the cheder was not supposed to function officially because of the war. And the Germans did not want the Jews to get any education. Therefore, we were going there, but it had to be a really, really secret, very secret. So I got a little-- very little Hebrew education.

Outside of Hebrew, were you-- were there any other subjects that were studied in this?

I don't really remember because I was pretty young at the time. And as I just barely started school, and I know I was younger than the rest of the children in the class-- because I remember, the teacher had once told, I think, my mother or my dad that I had a Yiddishe kop. And I still remember that. So I think in the Hebrew, I just-- we just went there. And I don't really remember exactly whether there are any other subjects besides Hebrew. It's possible that it were, but I couldn't tell you exactly.

What profession did your father have? How did he make his life, as you recall?

Yes, my father was a shoemaker. He made new shoes to order. And he also repaired shoes. So he had the-- two or three people working for him.

Was your family quite religious?

Very, yes. My father was extremely Orthodox. In fact, I had some people over this morning at the house. And we were talking. And I remember, he was very, very observant. In fact, my grandfather was the shamas of our temple, of the shul. And they lived in the same nearby community by the synagogue and used to go and visit him.

And my father was extremely Orthodox. We had a-- one temple. I don't think there was another one in that village. And the women, of course, did not sleep with the men-- in fact, I think, completely in a separate room. And my mother was a more modern woman. She came from Warsaw. So she had a little bit of a difficult time adhering to the strict rituals. But I remember my grandmother wore a sheitel, which is like a wig. The hair had to be shaved off. So it was pretty religious.

So you had a close family life and a comfortable life, as far as you remember prior to the war?

I-- it was a very close-knit family. We didn't live in a big city. So everything pretty much centered around the synagogue, the activities in the synagogue. And we had friends that came to the house. And we went to their homes. And that's it. And I think the big thing were the Shabbat, the preparation for Saturday.

And since my family was so religious, my mother was not permitted to cook on Saturday. So all the preparations had to be done Friday, Friday afternoon, where if anything was baked, there was a public bakery, where we'd bring even-- and I think she always made-- I remember, she always made a cholent.

And it was made in a clay pot with the beans, and the potatoes, and the brisket. And then there was brown paper tied. And everybody marked their name. And sometimes, when you had to go and pick up the cholent after you went to temple on Saturday, it was hard to read whose name was on it because it was kind of brown and baked on with some of the fat that was oozing out. But that was a traditional dish.

If your recollection serves you, when did you first feel the winds of war or the problems coming on? Can you recall?

Yes. I guess it was around '39 when the Germans invaded Poland. And I remember, I was very little. And there was a lot of restlessness in town. There were some people that were leaving. And others were not. And there was just discussion that the Germans had invaded Poland.

And I remember, the night before, our parents prepared name tags for all of us. And they put a name tag in, just in case we got separated or lost. And we stayed up pretty late. And everybody was quite concerned, and rightfully so, because the next day, the Germans came in. And they took us all out of our homes.

Where were they taken?

Well, they gathered everybody in-- it was a plaza. And what they did is they separated the men from the women and the children. And they were taking us to the Warsaw ghetto. And I was pretty young. And I was also with one of my sisters. And some of the-- the sisters were also separated. We were on little carts. We were pulled. And they had the men march. And on the way down, I've heard, whenever someone was ill and was not able to walk fast enough, they were hit.

Sorry to have to bring back memories like that. Did you rejoin your family when you got to the Warsaw ghetto?

Yes, when we finally got to the Warsaw ghetto, I was very fortunate that the whole family was together. And we-- well, when we arrived at the ghetto, the Germans put us all-- they had us take showers. We had to take all our clothes off. And we-- my mother had two brothers that were living in the Warsaw ghetto. And one of her brothers gave us a room to live in. We all-- the whole family lived in one room.

And they were not able to support us. So we had to go out and try and find a means to support us. And we-- my mother

did not work. My father got a job, a very menial job, so just a very, very little penny. They were just like penny jobs. And everything was very expensive. It was very difficult. So food was extremely scarce. There were days where we just had a--

--and how ghetto life was.

It was very sad, very depressing. And I said, yes, I think I was just finished off that food was very scarce. It was very expensive. And there were days that we just had a piece of bread and carrots. And I know, a long time, I didn't like carrots. If it's-- because it just brings back bad memories. But somehow or other, I was fortunate. I got out of the ghetto. But to go back, the sad part was that because some people did not have the nourishment, many of them died on the street. And just they covered them up with paper.

When you say that you were fortunate to get out of the ghetto, you would go out and come back?

Yes, I did that a few times. There was a woman from the village of Okuniew where I lived. And she would travel back and forth. She would bring in some food in exchange for some clothes, or jewels, or whatever. People would give her money.

And I think I made about two trips out of the ghetto. And since my father was a shoemaker, there were some people that owed him money. So I went back. And they gave me some food. So on one occasion, I brought back food to the ghetto. And then the last time when I was out of the ghetto, I was not able to get back anymore.

How dangerous was this mission of yours?

Well, there were these crossings they had with guards. And I was able to speak Polish pretty fluently. So they-- I went out. And the woman that took me out was Polish. So she smuggled me out. But the last time, we tried a different crossings. And I couldn't get back. They had started on the uprising.

And somehow or other, the last time I left, before I left, I remember, I was standing by a window. And my mother was saying, I want you to go because you're going to be the only one that will survive. We're all going to be killed. It was just she somehow knew it. And I never got back. And Okuniew was fairly close to the Warsaw ghetto. So several days later, I was sitting out and watching the fire as it was burning. And I was in the village.

For several weeks, I stayed with this lady that smuggled me out. And she had a-- the reason she wanted me to come back and live with her is because she had a cow. And she needed someone to look after her cow. So I was a pasture girl. I went out in the fields and I looked after the cow. And that was my childhood there.

And after a while, it was not safe to be in the village anymore. So I found out there were-- when they started deporting from the Warsaw ghetto, there was a young girl and her fiance escaped from the ghetto. And they asked to see me because I knew them from the village.

And they came over at night. And they told me that they had seen my family and some of the other people that I knew that were being deported from the building. And I believe they were taken to Treblinka. And then the day after, she came to see me. I heard that the Germans found out that they were all in the village. And they were killed. And then there was another woman was killed. So I knew it was not safe for me to stay there any longer.

So one day, again, shortly after they were killed, I was staying with this Polish family. And there was a knock on the door. And they went to the door. And they asked who it was. And they said, it was the Polish police. So while they were opening the door and stalling them, there was a window to the rear, so I went out the window. And there was a wheat field. And then they told the police that I wasn't there.

So of course, I couldn't come back. I was hiding. I was hiding in the field. And the man was very nice. He would come out and give me food. And I spent the first night-- I think it was the first and second night I spent in the field. I was pretty scared being out there all alone at night. So I think about the--

How old were you at that time?

I was about six or seven. And about, I think, the third night, he came out. He brought me some food. And he said, why don't you come back? And you can sleep in the attic. So I slept in the attic. And as I said, I was also afraid because I always-- ever since I was little, I was always afraid of the dark.

Anyhow, the Germans knew that I was there. And the policeman, one of the policemen there-- I became good friends with his daughter, somehow or other. I don't know why I can't remember details. She lived in Warsaw. And she found out that they were around, coming to look for me. So she made arrangements for me to come to Warsaw. She figured, Warsaw was a bigger city that would not recognize me.

So one morning, I walked down to the station. There was a train station, I don't know, two-three miles, whatever it was. It's just I don't remember the distances unless I would go back now. And I would know more specifically. And I took the train. And a few of the people recognized me because they used to go early in the morning to bring milk into the city, those big milk cans.

And she met me at the-- Wanda was her name. And she met me at the station. And I went to-- took me to her home. She had a little grocery store. I helped her out in the grocery store. And then we went to her apartment. And it was fine. Nobody knew me in Warsaw. And they didn't know who I was. But then shortly after the Warsaw Resurrection, there was started some fighting between the Germans and the Poles.

And her husband was-- we also-- we had air raids. And so every day, every other day, we had to run to the basement. And the last air raid was there in the basement. And one of the girls was trying to get back to her apartment. And she was hit by a shrapnel. And we had a doctor there. So he was trying to fix up her wound.

And then the next thing we know, there was a couple of German officers that came into the shelter. And they said, come. And they took all of us out of the shelter. And they took us to a very, very large place. And again, these were all Polish people. I was not then as a Jew, I was a Pole.

They separated all the men and the young boys they were going to shoot. And they had us all together and we figured, well, we're going to be killed as well. And there was one German officer-- and a lot of the women were crying. There were all kinds of screams. There's a lot of commotion going on. And you never knew what they were going to do.

So this one officer tried to be nice and console us. And he said that he also had a family in Germany. And he didn't want to-- he wasn't happy doing what he was doing. But then we heard that they were going to shoot all of us.

And then all of a sudden, this one officer arrived on a horse. And just as they had all their guns ready, pointing at us, he said, halt. And they stopped. And instead, a lot of the men were already killed that they took. And they took us to a-- I think it was called Pruszk³w, to a camp. We had to spend the night in a church. I was sleeping on the floor.

And there was some doctors that examining us. And they said, well-- there was some Polish doctors. And they were trying to help us. And they said that could help us escape if they told the Germans that we have jaundice. The Germans were afraid. So they painted us with yellow chalk. And they told the Germans, we had jaundice.

And they were going to separate me from the family that I was with. And I cried. I didn't want to do it. So finally, they let us all go together. And it was just outside of Warsaw. The family I was with had rented a summer place to live. And we were able to find the people. And they let us come and stay there for a while. I had no education. I wasn't going to school at all. But the lady that I was with, Wanda, just helped me a little bit to try and read and study. But I had no schooling through all those years.

So did you remain with this family for a long time?

We went to-- then we were staying in that village. Those people let us stay. And they were helping us. We had a lot of

potatoes. And they had some meat, some milk. We didn't have any money. We weren't working. But they were very nice. The peasants there helped us a little bit. And Wanda's husband was with the-- he was taken with the German Army. So she got worried that he got wounded. And he was in a hospital in Kraków. So we all went to Kraków. We found him. And we got an apartment. And we were living in Kraków. So I was living with them.

Was the family at all aware that you were Jewish then?

Oh, yes, they knew I was Jewish. Yes, they knew I was Jewish because they knew me from the village of Okuniew. So actually, they were taking, really, a risk in hiding me. But they got me out of Okuniew because in Okuniew, everybody knew me. And since the Germans already knew that I was there and they had killed several of the Jews that came back, that was one way she tried to protect me.

And nobody knew I was Jewish, except Wanda did and her family. So from Kraków, we then went to Bydgoszcz. And her husband, I think, was a policeman at the time. And she also worked in the post office. And I stayed with them.

How many children, other children were there in the family? Were there some in the Polish family?

At the time, she was just a newlywed at the time that I met her. After I left the family, then I know she had a son and a daughter. But she didn't have any children at the time that I lived with her. Her mother lived with her too.

So these were some very wonderful people, that helped you.

They were wonderful, yes. Yes, I still keep in touch with them.

Do you?

Yes. With this family, yes, I keep in touch.

So in Bydgoszcz, how was life going on there for you?

Then it was a little bit more normal because I was-- I started going to school. And since I missed all the years of school, I had no schooling, I started in fifth grade. I was at an age where I should have gone-- as I said, all those five years, I just didn't have any schooling. I started in fifth grade. And I was catching up. I was doing pretty well.

So from the middle of fifth grade, they put me into sixth grade. So I skipped because I was just-- I think I must have been about 11 at the time. And then I-- and I was in seventh grade. And I don't think I finished sixth and I went to seventh.

There was a trip to Denmark. And they picked the children that were good students and also didn't have any families. So I was picked to go to Denmark. So it was a very nice experience. There was a large group of children that went from different parts of Poland. And we took a boat called Batory, a Polish boat.

And we all went to Denmark and spent several wonderful weeks. And they figured, we needed a little bit of fattening up. I was anemic. After the war, there wasn't a whole lot of food. And we really ate very well in Denmark, treated very well.

Was this is after the war already?

That was after the war, yes. We actually-- yes, when I was in Kraków, we were liberated by the Russians. And right after the liberation, we went to Bydgoszcz.

And still with the same family?

Yes.

Yes. How was liberation? Do you recall?

By the Russians? Well, it was wonderful because we were so happy that we didn't have the Germans anymore.

Yeah. Yeah. Was there any fighting that was going on in Kraków at the time? Or did you hear anything?

Kraków was very, very little fighting. And I think, when I was still in the Warsaw ghetto for a while, there was a lot of fighting. And I remember, we had to really, really sneak around because there was a lot of all these hand grenades and this Molotov cocktails. They filled those bottles with-- I don't know whether they put gasoline or whatever, explosives.

And I had to get over, I think, with some of the other children to get some food. And we had to get over to the citadel to try and get-- there was some provisions there. So we went over there. That was very scary. There was a lot of fighting going on there. And in Kraków there wasn't a whole lot of fighting. I think the Russians came in pretty much without too much resistance.

As far as the city, did you-- was there any damage at all?

In Kraków? Oh, yes, there was some damage done, definitely. I think a lot of that fighting went over probably before I came there. There was a lot of damage-- not nearly as much damage as what Warsaw had. They destroyed the-- the Warsaw ghetto was in pretty bad shape.

Well, the Warsaw ghetto was destroyed pretty much from the resistance, the fighting that was going on by the resistance and the Germans.

Yes. Yes, definitely.

As far as bombing or anything like that, it really didn't take place.

No, the bombing was after, right. That's when the Germans and the Poles were fighting that. Was a lot of bombing. So I know, every-- just about every day, we had to go to a shelter. But the fighting during the Warsaw ghetto, it was a different kind of fighting. There wasn't any bombing there, I don't remember.

During all this period that you were living with your-- with this family, had you ever heard of what was going on at the ghetto? Did you ever hear of your family or anything?

Well, I only know that they said, the ghetto was pretty much destroyed. And the last contact that I had is before I went to Warsaw from that young girl, Toba, and her boyfriend. They saw my family being taken to a concentration camp. And they believed that they were taken to Treblinka. That was the last contact I had.

Yeah. did you any-- you didn't hear, consequently, what was going on in the ghetto, too, after that? You never had any contact?

No, not at all-- well, because there was just-- at the time that I was not able to get back to the ghetto, it's because the fighting had begun. And they just eliminated, pretty much, the ghetto. They had deported whoever they could, except for the resistance that was left and the fighting that went on. It was pretty much burned.

So after your experience in Denmark with your class, had you gone back to Poland?

No. Well, I-- oh, yes, that's right. I went back to the family in Bydgoszcz. My family I was living with. But I had a-- I had an uncle in Paris that I was corresponding with. And he said that he was trying to get papers to bring me to France. He also-- he was in Auschwitz. He was deported with his wife. And he lost his wife. He remarried. And I was-- originally was from Poland. But he lived in France for many, many years.

And I wanted to find the only relative I had. So he was getting papers for me to come over. And shortly after I came back from Denmark, two men from Warsaw came from some Jewish Zionist organization. And they said that I was going to France, that my uncle had papers for me. And it was strange because I had just gotten a letter from my uncle recently. And he said, well, be patient, in a little longer. It's just taking time.

And they said, your uncle wants you to come. So I was sad. I packed everything because I had a good, close girlfriend. And I went. And they had us in and Pruszk³w for a while outside of Poland. And we were in a train through Germany. They gave us all false passports, false papers.

And then we got to Paris. And I said, I want to see my uncle. They said, you don't have an uncle. You're going to Israel. And I said, no. I have an uncle. I'm coming. I came here to go to my uncle. And they said, no. And they actually tried, by force, to take me. And I said, I wasn't going.

They had a dining room there. And I was having dinner. I went over to one of the waitresses. And I said, would you bring that note to my uncle? I said, it was really important. And she delivered it. And he came there at midnight to get me. And they wouldn't let him in. And he had to make a big fuss. And he got me out of there. And I went to live with my uncle.

That's a strange twist that they [CROSS TALK].

Yes. Yes, that's what I did. And I understand because I had a letter from him, and he said, just a bit, be a little patient. It'll take a little longer. And I still don't know how they knew where I was.

When you say you were-- were there a lot of young people such as you that were?

Yes. I think it looks-- probably, they tried to collect all the Jewish children they survived to send them to Israel. And they must have had my name and knew that I was one of them.

And so was your reunion with your uncle happy?

It was very happy, yes. Yes.

And did you remain with him for some time?

For a short period of time. Yes. There were some other escapades.

Well, we'd like to hear about them.

Well, OK. Since I lived in with this family in Poland, I practiced Catholicism. And I was a very devout Catholic at the time. So when I got to Paris, I told my uncle and my aunt that I'm going to go to church. And my aunt said, no, you're not going to church. So that didn't work out very well.

So I ran away from my uncle. My uncle, I think, was more tolerant. But my aunt didn't want to hear of it. So I guess I must have been pretty shrewd at the time. I was there for a short period of time. And I was sent down on the street. And they had these little round kiosks, where they had newspapers.

Well, I found out they had a Polish newspaper. So I took the-- I bought the Polish newspaper. And I called the editor of the Polish paper. And I met with the editor. And I told him that I needed to go to church and all that. And he helped me get into a Polish boarding school where I could go to church. I still-- I would-- my uncle, I would visit with my uncle and all. But I had to go to church.

You were brainwashed.

Right, right. So I went to church. I went to church. And then later on, I met a-- I was in the boarding school in Paris.

And I made good friends with my Latin teacher. And she used to have me come over to her house there with her husband. They were-- he was a doctor from Poland. And she was a teacher in the boarding school where I went to.

And she knew a family that-- from the United States, from Canada, in fact, that wanted to adopt a child. OK. So she introduced me to that family. And they wanted, really, someone younger. And also, they didn't want anybody that had family because they were worried that their family-- OK. So that did not work out.

But then I decided, I wanted to go to Canada anyway. So I went to the American Jewish Joint. And they helped me get to Canada. I immigrated to Canada, lived with a family there, went to school. Then I decided that I didn't want to be Catholic anymore. Every time I would hear the Jewish music, it just tore into me.

Was it something from-- that you could remember from your childhood?

It must have been. It must have been. It was within me. Because I just-- then I realized that Catholicism isn't part of my life. It was something I needed at the time. It was supportive and soothing. I didn't have any family. And this family was part of that religion. Then after a while, I realized, when I was back with Jewish people, that I didn't feel that way anymore. So I turned back to Judaism.

Is it-- the incident about you being forced to go to Israel-- is it possibly because they realized that you had turned from Judaism, they tried to get you back into that fold?

I don't know what they knew about me. I don't know where they came from. I had no idea. Those men came. And they said, you're going to see your uncle. And that's-- but they gave me no explanation. So I had no idea. And I remember, there was another girl there that I became friendly with when we were waiting to get our papers, the false passports, to leave Poland. And she was also Catholic. And I think we were understanding and consoling each other because our feelings were very similar.

So I really don't know how it was-- I guess they must have known that I was there. And but I even-- I studied the catechism. I took my First Communion when I was living with that family in Bydgoszcz. And I wouldn't say that they forced me. I think it's something I really wanted to do. But of course, I was a child at the time.

But in a way, that probably saved you a great deal because you were so--

Probably.

--so a part of the community that they never suspected that [CROSS TALK].

That's right. That's right. That probably did. Right. Right.

In Canada, did this family adopt you? Or you just lived with them?

No. I was already 15 when I came to Canada. And I think, at this point, I decided, I didn't want to be adopted by anybody anymore. So I went to school. I became a school teacher.

And how did you support your way through?

Well, the American Jewish Joint helped me out. As I said, I stayed with a couple of different families. And I graduated from high school when I was 16. I was a teacher at 18. So I was earning my own way. I got some scholarships to help through the school. So I've been on my own for a long time.

Seems that way--

Yes, oh, yes, forever. Forever.

--from the age of six or so, yeah.

Yes.

In Canada, did you then mingle more with the Jewish community?

Oh, yes, I went to a Jewish camp. And actually, when I was in Paris, I went to a Jewish camp too. That's right. I think it was a Jewish camp. Yes, I went to a Zionist camp. And I belonged to Young Judea. And I went to temple.

So becoming a teacher and earning your own livelihood, did you then get married in Canada?

Well, when I lived in Canada, I met my husband, yes. And then I came to the United States.

After you married him?

Yes. Actually, he came to live in Canada for a little less than a year because I had to-- I was also finishing my degree and teaching at the same time.

So did you have a family of your own?

Yes. I have three children.

Some children-- any grandchildren yet?

Not yet. Not yet. I'm waiting.

Any of them married yet?

One, one married, and two are still single. Yes.

Yeah. Could you give us their names also?

Yes. Michelle is my oldest daughter. And she's been married for eight years. And Laura is my second. And she is single. And she-- and Glenn is my son. And he's also single.

How did you come to Phoenix?

My husband had a job transfer.

What is his occupation?

He's a-- well, I'm divorced now. He's a sales representative for a furniture company.

Do any of your children live in Phoenix?

Unfortunately not, but I have one in Los Angeles. And my oldest daughter just moved from Boston to Northern California. And I have a son in Washington, DC. And hopefully, he's going to come to the West Coast too soon.

Does he care for the West Coast?

Yes, he does. Yes. He just started a new job in Washington, DC. But I think he likes the West Coast, probably back in the San Francisco area. He lived there for three years.

And presently, your work, your livelihood is?

I'm a social worker.

Social worker.

Yes.

The reason we invited you to do this-- and we hope to leave some legacy-- is so that this sort of tragedy doesn't happen again. In your mind, could anything like this happen again?

It's always possible, even with what happened in Saudi Arabia now. And the antisemitism, I think, is pretty rampant all over, I would say. And even though the Jewish people have their own country, there's still a lot of problems involved in the Middle East. I hope it never happens again.

That's the main reason why we try and leave these personal experiences behind so that it cannot be denied that it ever happened.

I wouldn't want to see my children to go through what I had to go through. I hope they never would have to.

I thank you very much, Maria, for coming and telling us your experience. It's always very difficult to prove of your learning.

It's very memorable.

So it was-- you have a very close family life. And it was a very supportive family life.

Yes, it was. It was. And we had my-- one set of my grandparents lived at the time.

Are we? Yeah, go ahead.

One of my father's parents lived in the village too. And it was nice. I remember going over there and visiting. And unfortunately, when the Germans invaded Poland, they came in to Okuniew, they took my uncle, my father's younger son. And when my grandfather found out, he was so upset, he had a heart attack and died. So that happened just as the Germans came in.

You don't know what happened to these people that were just picked up?

They were taken to the concentration camp. You mean my--

Yeah, like your uncles.

No, I don't know what they did with him. Right.

Would they pick up men at random like that?

Yes, they just did. They did with them what they want. And he was so upset. I think that he may have been released later on. But then, like part of my family that lived in different parts of the country, I've heard that they were also taken to concentration camps. And I had tried-- I had written to the International Red Cross, to try and find any members of my family.

I had located a cousin that survived after the war. And then they traced him. And then there was no forwarding address. Then two years ago, I went to Israel. I went to Yad Vashem. And I also registered my family and hoped that someone would show up. And I have not found anybody.

You have never gone back to Okuniew, to your hometown?

No, I haven't. I'd like to someday. In fact, I was planning on taking a trip, possibly this year. But I will-- for a while, the United States government was not willing to protect my safety. Because when I left Poland, I left on illegal papers. I left on a euro passport, which is an international passport. And the Poles could still claim me as their citizen. But I think now that the political situation is a little bit better, I don't think I would be afraid.

So you would like to go back?

Yes, I would like to go back.

Yeah. Just have you ever heard of anyone from your town that has survived?

No, I haven't because the few people that survived and came to town were killed.

After the war?

Yeah-- no, that was still during the war.

Oh, still during the war.

Yes, hiding out. Yes, those are the people that got killed.

They possibly escape from the ghettos and were hiding out.

Yes. Yes. And then they found out by the Germans and the Polish police. And they were in hiding, they killed them.

But after the war, for instance--

Was finished.

--you never heard of anyone-- No. --actually, from you hometown?

No, I haven't.

The only people that survived from Okuniew were the people that left before the war.

Yeah. And you said that you still correspond with the family that helped you?

Yes, I still do. Yes.

And so you have good relationship with them.

Oh, yes, yes. Yes.

They treat you as a member of the family even now? Or not so?

Well, I don't know. We don't have-- it's kind of-- I was hoping they would come to the United States to visit. I occasionally send them a little package.

Where do they live now?

They still live in Bydgoszcz, yes.

In Bydgoszcz.

Yes.

There, which is a mining town, if I remember correctly.

Well, Bydgoszcz is more like a seaport.

Seaport?

Yes.

Because they have some of the strikes, the miner strikes.

Well, you remember the Lech Walesa? It was Gdansk, which is nearby. That was not too far from Bydgoszcz.

Well, I'm glad you added that.