

Today is Sunday, December 21, 1980. My name is Fran Gutterman. I'm at the home of Brenda Wluka, who resides in Milton, Massachusetts. And I am here to conduct an oral history with Ms. Wluka. OK, could you tell me where you were born?

I was born in Poland, in a little town, which was called Podberezhe, which was about 50 kilometers from the main city, Vilna.

And what year was that when you were born?

I was born in 1929, January 22.

OK, could you tell me what your family consisted of?

There were a mother and father, and I had one sister, who was eight years younger than myself. I was eight years an only child, a spoiled child.

What was your mother and father's name?

Mali and Eli Yitzhak. And the last name was Patashnik.

And your sister's name?

My sister's name was Sarah. And she was only four, I think, when she was killed. If I wouldn't have a picture, I wouldn't really know her.

You were eight years older than her?

Yes. I was 12, and she was 4 when the war broke out. See, the Germans took over my part of Europe in 1941. The Russians came in in '39, stayed for two years, when the war broke out. And then they left, and the Germans took over. And in 1942, I left my home.

We were in the ghetto just for three weeks. And they liquidated the ghetto. And luckily, my mother, and my sister, and I ran away. And we were living-- we were going from farm to farm, people that we knew from before the war.

Well, we'll get to that part about what happened during the war. But before we do that, I would just like to get a little bit more information.

About my life.

About your life before the war.

OK. sure.

OK, first let me just ask you, what did your parents do? And would you pronounce that for me again--

Oh, this town, Podberezhe. It's not on the map.

Podberezhe.

I don't think it's on the map. My kids always ask me about it.

Podberezhe.

Podberezhe.

OK.

It's a little town. It's a town right near the little farm where the Polish president was born, Pilsudski. There was all farms around it. We were just a little town.

So it was a farm--

All around was farms. I mean we were a city, a little city, with a lot of grocery stores. And my parents had a grocery store. My mother had a grocery store. My father was always involved with orchards and orchards of fruits. He used to sell fruits with a big quantity, with a trainload to the big cities. He owned orchards.

And they used to pick apples, and pick all that-- pears, and all the other fruits. And that was his line. He had very little to do with the grocery. We had a grocery right in our house, one room was the store.

Did the orchard also-- the fruit from the orchard go into the grocery also?

Once in a while, not too much, no. In Poland, we used to sell apples in the winter, frozen apples.

Frozen?

Yeah, they used to freeze, and they used to sell them. They were very delicious.

Was it like a treat?

Very, it's like a baked apple, very tasty, yeah.

OK, you say that you lived in the house with your father, and mother, and your sister, who was born eight years later. Did you have any grandparents at the time?

Yes, I had my father's mother and father. And my mother only had a father. Her mother died before she was married. But he remarried. I had a step grandmother. But my mother's father was the most dearest little grandfather I ever had, with a white beard.

And they also lived in--

They all lived in our town, yeah.

In your town.

In fact, when the war broke out, we were all placed in a ghetto. And my father's parents lived in the street where the ghetto was formed. There were two streets. And we all had to-- everybody looks for a relative, so we moved in with my grandparents, six of us. I mean, plus the other son, and the child, and there was quite a few of us.

Did you did you grow up-- you said you grew up in a small-- was it a town, or a city, or a village?

No, it was a town. It was a town.

A small town?

Yeah, a very small town.

And it was mostly farms?

Well, farms around us. In our town, we had a lot of woods, pine woods. And people used to come from the big cities for their vacation. There was a resort place with a lot of hotels

Oh, really?

And we used to cater. My mother used to bring every morning-- I used to carry hot bagels to the hotels and rolls. And people come from Warsaw and from Łódź, because it was all for their health. They used to call it a pensionnat, where they used to go for their health mostly. Here, you go on vacation to have a good time, but they came for the health. Because they needed to get away from the cities.

How would you describe your family in terms of religiousness? How would you--

Very traditional. My mother didn't wear a sheitel. My father went to shul every morning and every night.

So would you say you were Orthodox?

Oh, yeah. I think in my town, every Jew was Orthodox. There was no other religion. We didn't know that anything else existed.

But like in the United States, people are Jewish, but they aren't necessarily religious.

Yeah, but in our hometown, that I can remember-- I was-- well, when the war broke out, I don't think anybody was anything, but Orthodox. A lot of them maybe didn't believe in nothing. There was a lot of maybe younger people. And my parents were very young. My mother was only 34 when she was killed.

34?

Both of them. My parents were both the same age. My father was killed immediately, in 1941. And my mother was killed a year later.

In your village, what percentage of people would you say were Jewish? Do you have any idea?

Yes, we know. I know the statistic. After the war, they told us. There was 800 Jews in our town.

And how many people were in the town?

And when the war was over, 80 survived.

800 Jews out of how many?

Oh, I really don't know. I couldn't tell you. But it was quite a few Jews for that little shtetl. They called it the shtetl. And 80 survived. After the war, when I came from the war, right after the war was over in 1940-- at the end of '44, the Russians took over our town.

And out of the 80, I think, I could say at least 20 died right after the war, from typhoid, and from overeating, and a lot of them got killed back going back to the farms to collect things.

I was, fortunately, very lucky. I still stayed three months on the farm after the war was over, because I had no place to go. And they were very good to me, and they wanted me to stay.

But all the Jews that were in town that survived said, how can you stay on a farm? They're still killing Jews. I said, where am I going to go? Nobody asked me to-- invited me to stay with them. But then I did find somebody. I'll tell you as you asked me questions, that told me to come back to the city, and I never went back.

So how about educational wise? You were 12 years old when the war broke out. How old were you when you started school?

Six. And I went to Hebrew school. My parents wouldn't have me go to a public school which Polish kids. We had a public school, where the Jewish kids could go. And they weren't treated too nice. But if you had no choice, that's where you went.

But my parents paid, because even in Poland, for Hebrew school, you paid. And I went to a Tarbut. They called it a Tarbut school. And in fact, it was such a strict Tarbut-- it's a Hebrew word.

Does it mean [? produce ?] or something?

It's a Hebrew school, but it's not-- it's not strict-- well, we had a rabbi there that used to teach us the Tanakh, you know, Chumash, but that wasn't that we learned just religion.

Was it a girl's school or girl and boy?

No, girl and boy. And it was privately paid. And they taught us Polish in there. We learned arithmetic, and history, and geography-- a regular school. And, of course, once a day we had Chumash or Tanakh, which I really didn't like, but I had to do it. And, in fact, we couldn't speak Jewish. We had to speak Hebrew only. If you spoke Jewish-- if they caught you, they used to give you a black mark.

Really?

Yeah, and if you had a lot of them, they called your mother in, or your father, or whatever. It was mostly the mother. The father never had time to come.

What was your level-- in terms of your family, in terms of the socioeconomic status?

We were called middle class. Because my parents were-- for that town that we lived in, we had our own house, which had no water. We had electricity. We had to go get water from a well. And my father always-- they dressed pretty well. We ate good. I mean, in Europe, if you had chicken once a week and beef once a week, it was eating good. Because meat wasn't a big deal. You ate dairy mostly for dinner and fish.

Was dinner the afternoon meal, the big meal of the day?

The big meal was in the afternoon. Because especially if somebody like my father, who had his own business, so he was home-- when he wanted to come for dinner, he could come home for dinner. But you always ate, like for supper, dairy, or eggs, or nothing heavy. It doesn't mean there weren't fat people, but my parents weren't fat.

There was no--

I didn't eat nothing. I lived on candy. And I was just-- the time I became-- I really filled out was the war, eating all that bread and potatoes on the farm, and a lot of pork, and all that stuff. But I was always--

Do you remember-- now you said you were 12 when the war broke out, but do you remember at all, up until that point, encountering any anti-Semitic experiences?

Yes, I had a personal experience. I must have been not more than eight or nine years old. And I was very dramatic in school. I was in every play. And I was always singing. And I was in a play. And I played-- I had to dance a Hasidic dance. And I had to wear a navy suit. And I had to have the tails like.

And the only suits that you could get was from the boys that went to a high school, private high school. They had those

navy suits with the double-breasted gold buttons. And I needed a suit like that from one of my cousins, who lived in a different street. I had to go get that suit.

And I was walking, and it was Sunday. And we had, like in the streets-- in the main street-- we lived on a side street. On the main street had like a-- here they call it like a drugstore, but you had ice cream there, and you could have coffee there and a piece of cake.

And I was walking to get to my cousin's house. And a Polish little boy, my age, had his dog with him. And he told the dog to jump on me. And the dog jumped me. And my father had to be sitting in that drugstore having coffee, or tea, or whatever. And he saw it. And being my father, he grabbed that Polish kid, and he was ready to kill him. He really hit him.

Well, the next day, the police came, and they closed our store. And they were going to do anything they could to us. And we had to-- on our knees, beg to forgive. That he didn't mean it. That the dog could have bit me and could have killed me.

So you're saying that because your father protected me.

Because my father protected me, and because he hit a Polish kid-- if he would have hit a Jewish kid, nobody would say anything. He didn't hit him to kill him. He just slapped him or something. But I remember as a child, the Polish kids hated us. I mean, I can't say all bad about the Polish people, because the Polish people did save my life.

It was a farmer-- like you know, there's good and bad in everybody. But as a child, I remember that the anti-Semitism was so big. Those words-- they always called us Jew. I mean, in Polish, Jew, it sounds even worse than Jew.

Zyd or something?

Zyd. And they just--

Like a curse word of sorts.

Yeah. In a way, I hated Hebrew, school, because I didn't like the rabbis, with the Chumash with this. But in a way, it was so much pleasant, not to be-- because in the public schools, they always used to beat up the Jewish kids.

Did you have any Polish friends? Did you have any kids--

Not really. I mean, our neighbors were Polish, in the backyard. Like, they lived in one of my aunt's houses. And they were pretty nice. But they were-- like if Christmas came, we were dying to see the tree. And my mother used to send over some apples or something.

And so they did such a big favor, just to come in to see the tree. But we were scared. Like the Polish kids were taught that the Jews put their blood in the matzah. That's how we were scared of their Christmas.

Were you talking about--

The Christians-- the Catholics.

Poland taught children that--

Oh, yes. I mean that the Jews--

That would you take the blood of what-- non-Jews?

No, the Jesus's blood was put in the matzah. I mean, I'm sure a lot of kids in this country heard about it. And I was a

child, but I know that I was associating mostly with Jewish kids.

So you were born in 1929.

Yeah.

And the war broke out--

In 19--

'39.

'39. Well, the Russians came in-- In 1939, the Russians came in.

Where?

And to me, as a child-- to my hometown-- I didn't feel any war. It was beautiful. I didn't have to go to Hebrew school.

September?

I don't remember what month. The war broke out in June, I remember, in Poland. It was June, because we were standing outside and listening to the radio, speakers were-- certain buildings had them.

I don't remember what month the Russians came in. I know it wasn't winter. So it must have been like the war broke out in June. Maybe that year, they came in, to my hometown. They came in, not to Warsaw. That's where the Germans--

And Germany hadn't invaded Poland?

Not yet. They invaded Poland, not my town. The Russians came.

Why did Russia invade your town if Germans weren't there?

I cannot understand it why. I just know that-- my husband comes from Warsaw, and they had-- the Germans were there in 1939. And then in my town, they didn't get till '41. We had the Russians for two years.

And the Russians, in those days, to the Jews, were pretty good, especially to a kid like me. I was so glad I didn't have to go to Hebrew school. And I was taking Russian lessons. And there was dancing, and music.

So you were like about 10 years old.

Yeah, I was 10 years old. And then, when the war broke out, I was 12 years old, when the Germans came in my town.

In 1941. Really, they chased them right out. The Russians went back, and the Germans came in. And that's where our troubles really started.

And the Germans were there until '45?

In my hometown-- well, I left in '42 to the farm, but they were there all the time, till the war was over.

So the war broke out around June, you say, of 1939.

Yeah.

As the war became closer and closer, was there any talk about war in your hometown?

Yes. Oh, yes, there was talk about war. And there was talk about the cities, that this and this happened. The cities where the Germans took over, and they liquidated Jewish towns, and they made ghettos. But nobody believed nothing.

Well, before the war even actually started, were your family thinking of possibly leaving Poland? Or were there any ever-- was there ever any talk of--

No, as I remember, my parents didn't. See, my father's family-- my grandfather's whole family live right here, in Boston, in America. His eight brothers and sisters-- see, I think he had five sisters and three brothers, and he was the only one left. And they were the only ones that kept my grandfather going. They sent the money from America.

And they really were wonderful to him. And they wanted them to come. And my father, in those days, had a single brother, who was a schoolteacher. And he had his papers to go. And he kept delaying it, and delaying it. I think if not the war, we were so settled in our lives, we didn't want to go any place. Were very happy--

You were content.

--where we were. We were very content-- very.

So you were basically going to school every day. And that was what your life was at the time.

Yeah, from the year I was six years old and the war broke out. When the war broke out, in 1939, I was just going to go to a high school, which we didn't have. I had to go to the big city, to Vilna, where my aunt lived. And I was going to live with her. And that was a big deal for me.

Didn't the war break out in September of 1939?

You mean in Poland?

Yeah.

I thought it was June. I don't remember exactly.

I don't remember either.

Well, you could look this up. Because I really don't remember.

So you were 10 years old when the war broke.

When the war broke out, yeah.

And do you remember how the war-- first word about the war reached you? I mean--

Well, they told us that they're bombing.

Ha the war started before Russia came into your village?

See, when the Russians came into our village, they just came in with the tanks and with military. It looked like a parade coming in. There was no bombs. We heard bombs-- like when I was on the farm already, we could hear bombing in the big cities.

Like you could hear the bombings. And we could hear the planes going over, flying over us. See them even, at night. And they used to light up the farms at night, the reflectors.

But, well, it came to a point in the war, when I was on the farm, that I wished a bomb should get me already. You hide, and hide, and hide, and you get tired of it. But I didn't have any.

I think one thing I would like to do is talk about what-- really, the war breaking out, and then what happened at that point, when the war broke out. If you can try to tell the story in sort of chronological order. I mean, the Russians came into your city.

Yeah, the Russians came in, and they took over our city. And they made us feel very comfortable and very good. Of course, we were called capitalists to the Russians. So my father had to give up his orchards and his things, whatever he had. My mother's grocery wasn't that capitalistic looking. It was a little store, a hole in the wall. So they let her run it.

And in the war was mostly trade business anyway. The farmers used to come and bring us eggs, and we gave them flour, and sugar. And it was mostly trading. And they let us go-- they opened up-- they made the Hebrew school into a public school. And they taught Russian, of course.

So it became part of Russia.

Like Russia, you know. And the borders opened up.

Was it Russia?

No, Poland was-- it was still Poland, but they were governing over the Poles. There were Polish-- how do you say that word? The Polish people were running it under the Russian rules. They didn't do nothing on their own. And that happened only for two years.

And then when the Germans took over the whole part of Poland, they started chasing them out. And they went back. And the Germans just occupied our town.

And one nice day, in the morning, they told us we have to move out. And we just have to-- they made a ghetto. And that's when we moved in with our grandparents. And we were in the ghetto only three weeks, and they liquidated.

Let me ask you, when the Russians were there, they were there for two years, so how did you spend those two years, you and your family? I mean, did you continue-- you continued in school?

I kept going to school.

But it was--

It was a public school. They didn't even let us learn Jewish, just Russian, Polish. We had Polish one hour, whatever, and arithmetic. And mostly about Russian history. And they wanted to make us into a Communist party. Us kids were to dress wearing uniforms and all that thing.

And we had Joseph Stalin and Lenin all over the school, plastered. And we had to sing to them. We used to make jokes, and it was dangerous. Because even kids couldn't make jokes about them.

Did you feel afraid?

No, not at all. Not then at all. We didn't even think what fear is until the Germans came in.

So they were sort of-- I mean, they weren't hard to you.

No, they weren't really. See, I come from a town that was-- I think the only two rich people were the doctor and the druggist. There was nobody that was a capitalist. We already--



Most of you were working class.

Working class, and my parents were called the middle class, because we owned a house. We didn't own anything else. We had a cow-- one cow, and a horse, and stuff like that.

So when the Russians came, you had to give up anything that you owned?

They didn't have nothing to take from us. My father just had to give up-- he couldn't be a businessman anymore. If he did anything, it was like in a cooperative business. He couldn't be a private business.

OK. So you lived there for two years.

Yeah.

And you continued going to school.

Yeah.

And how about religious wise, what happened?

They didn't stop them to go to shul we had our little shul still. And my father went to shul. And the holidays were observed, like before. And the kids enjoyed it more, I think. It was freedom for the kids. As a kid, that's what I remember. I don't know how my parents felt about it, but they didn't discuss it with me.

Were there any changes in your house at all when the Russians came in? Could you feel anything? Life just sort of went on as usual.

Went on as usual, yeah.

So when the Russians were there, you don't recall-- well, you went to a different school as a result.

I went to the same school, but there was no more religious school. They took over.

Did Poles go to that school too?

No.

So it continued to be only Jews.

It was Jewish kids, but they were teaching us Russian-- mostly Russian.

And in your home life, and social life, and religious life, nothing changed.

Not to my knowledge. Maybe for my parents, it was harder. But as a kid, I don't remember anything that happened to me while the Russians were there. I just remember there were dances all the time and music. And we enjoyed.

Did you have any idea what was going on outside your village, or outside your town, in terms of--

When the Russians took over?

You knew that Germans--

We knew that the Germans are taking over the world, that the parents were talking. But even my parents, I think, in Europe, didn't believe anything like this is really humanly possible. We heard stories. Like a few months before they

liquidated our ghetto, 50 kilometers-- I don't know how many miles that is-- a ghetto was liquidated, and maybe five people ran away.

And they came to our town at night, and they begged us to leave while we can get out. That it happened, they killed everybody. We didn't believe them. We didn't run until the Germans actually closed in our ghetto, and they gave us like an hour we could get out, whoever could.

They didn't stop-- they let us run because they knew they were going to get us in the end. They got almost everybody-- my mother, and my sister, and myself were the lucky ones. I mean, they weren't lucky, because they were killed later. But we walked out. We just walked out. And we walked right into a farm. It was like five miles, you walked to a farm.

Let me ask you, so the Russians were there until till--

Till '41.

Do you remember around what month?

The month, I don't remember.

Do you remember what time of year it was?

Because I remember when our ghetto was liquidated, it was Yom Kippur night.

And you were in the ghetto for three weeks?

Three weeks. So it must have been September.

It must have been like August or September--

September.

--when the Germans came.

Yeah, because I remember in the morning, when we got up, we were hiding in a bath house, and it was frost in the morning. It was ice. It was very cold. And it was Yom Kippur the next day. And the woman brought food, and my mother wouldn't eat. I remember that. I ate. She didn't eat.

So it was around September of 1941, the Germans invaded your town.

Yeah.

And the Russians left.

They were gone. They killed a lot of them. They'd throw them off the bridges. Whoever, when they-- a lot of them didn't want to leave their offices. They were big shots. So they were mostly shot. Right in the offices, they shot them.

And how did everyone in your town react? What happened?

Well, the people panicked. And they all got together. And everybody became very close. And, of course, when they threw us into two streets together, all 800 people, so you couldn't be any closer. So everybody had a relative someplace. And a lot of people ran, see. Like young people-- I mean teenage people, who had a chance, they ran with the Russians.

I see, they left with the Russians.

They ran with the Russians.

And they went back to Russia?

They went way into Russia. A lot of them had relatives. See, my mother had a sister in Moscow, who went in the First World War. She's there with her family. I don't know if she's still alive, but her kids are. I keep in touch with my aunt from Israel. And they tell me-- we used to have letters. I don't know if she's still living.

She married a Cossack in the First World War. And she just ran off with him. And a lot of people were-- like my aunt's children, who are alive today, two of them-- she had eight children. And they survived in Russia. I mean, they had it very tough, but they survived.

So a lot of people then ran with the Russians.

Yes, a lot of Jewish people.

Did Germans kill Jews, the people in your town too, when they invaded?

When they invaded, they picked out certain families immediately. And it so happened that in our hometown, a lot of people had the same names. They had no relations. My father, by the Russians was-- by the Germans was known as that he had money. And I don't know, whatever. And we were on the list that night.

And somehow, we had a feeling not to sleep in our house. We just slept in the next house.

List of people to be killed?

To be killed-- they took us, like 10, 12 families a night, middle of the night, and they just killed them.

Shot them?

Shot them.

In the middle of the town?

No, they had woods. We had a lot of woods around our way. In fact, I went to see my father's grave. My father wasn't killed then. My father was killed when they made the ghetto. The night they liquidated the ghetto, the next morning my father was killed. He hid himself with another few people, and they found him.

But that night-- every night, a few families were disappearing.

And was it all done secretly so that Germans weren't openly admitting that they were killing these people.

No, everything was-- they were so nice. In fact, they took-- whoever had a pretty decent home, they used to have the German officers live in our homes.

So Germans came in and took over, right? Now, when the Germans came in, how did your life change for you?

Immediately, no more school. I mean, it was vacation time anyways when the war broke out. And when the Germans took over, there was no more school. When the Russians left, school for me was over. And we were in the ghetto.

OK, so the Germans came in, and they took over the town. And they told everyone that they had to move? I mean, how did the ghetto form? How did they tell you?

They just came, and they said, you all have to be in this zone in so many hours on this and this street. You take what you

can.

Did they send messages?

No, I think they just came from house to house, or they sent like messengers, and to let you know that this and this hour, you have to be out from that house.

And go--

Certain houses were moved sooner. Like if they were nicer houses, they needed them for their soldiers or for their officers, so they moved them out sooner.

How quickly did this happen from the time they entered?

Oh, they were, I think, in our town maybe a month. And in that month, they were moving us out.

Did your town have a Judenrat or anything?

Yes, we had a Judenrat. And that's how we found out they're going to liquidate the ghetto. Because the Judenrat was notified that day. In the ghetto, there were two streets of the ghetto. And the Judenrat was notified that no more killing Jews. They should hang up posters. See, they didn't want a panic. They did it with every town.

They hung out posters in the streets. No more killing Jews. We can go out shopping, free. We don't have to wear the latta and everything is going-- and right away-- but the master of the Judenrat-- for money and for things, you could buy off the Germans too. Somebody told him that tonight they're going to liquidate the ghetto.

And it was Yom Kippur Eve. And everybody was cooking, and baking, whatever. My father used to work on the railroad for the Germans. They used to give him this fish. And my mother used to soak it for days and then make fish balls from it. And everybody was cooking.

And the man that was the president of the Judenrat, him, and his sister, and his wife, and his kids, they were all living in the same house. And they were cooking. And all of a sudden, they're packing up, and they're walking out.

And that's what started the panic. They wouldn't tell us why they were walking out. But it was enough for us to know. And that's when my father said, we should go. And the men will get out later. But they never got out-- that night.

So this was in the ghetto, itself.

This was in the ghetto-- three weeks after we were in the ghetto.

The Judenrat was formed in the ghetto.

In the ghetto, yeah.

Could you tell me a little bit about how the ghetto was formed? Like, I know the Germans sent out messages or whatever.

That we have to move in, and if we have relatives in those streets, we can move in with the relatives. And I remember--

So there were 800 people living in a radius of about two blocks?

Two blocks, two streets. I mean, long streets. And like, in my grandmother's house, we consisted of one bedroom, a living room, dining room-- one-- it's a combination, and a little kitchen so my grandparents were living there, my parents, and my sister and I, was six.

And my aunt's little girl, who survived from another ghetto, that somebody brought her over with my aunt. Her husband was killed. It was, I think, 10 of us living in this-- those facilities.

And how was the Judenrat formed, for example? Did people get together?

I don't remember that at all.

What happened-- so you were there for three weeks in the ghetto, right?

Yeah.

What did you do-- I mean, what was life like-- food, and schooling, and religion?

They let us out. We had to wear the latta, the yellow latta.

You had to wear the yellow star.

Yeah, star.

That started once you moved into the ghetto?

We had to wear it immediately. If I recollect, I think we had to wear the star before we even went into the ghetto. Because I remember we couldn't walk on the sidewalk. The Jews couldn't walk on the sidewalk. We had to walk on the street. And that's when the Polish kids were after us.

They were pushing us off and spitting at us. Kids that went were our neighbors. That was the rule, Jews couldn't walk on the sidewalk, and Jews had to wear the yellow star. And in the ghetto, they used to let us out. There was a big market. Every week was a market, where the farmers used to bring the food.

So they let us out. And we had so much time to be in that market and then go back. Because there was always a guard in front of the ghetto. But they weren't really that strict. Actually, if you could-- if you knew-- if you would be so scared, and knew really what's going to happen to you, you could have walked out a hundred times, but nobody believed.

We were so content. We're going to the shopping market, and come back, and go on with our lives. I mean, as a child, what I--

What did you think was happening? I mean, did you wonder?

Nothing. As a child, I didn't think of nothing.

Did you think it was unusual?

You just heard about people getting killed. And you just said, nobody's going to kill me.

But you knew that as a Jew that you were being singled out.

Oh, that we're being singled out, and were being punished for something. I didn't know why they were doing this to us. But there was a latta, and where they're going to the market, and with a police escort all the time, watching us.

Did you feel any sort of shame about being Jewish? Because you were being so-- as a kid, it would be natural to feel that way.

I don't think there was any shame. I just hated the Polish people so much, the way they treated us. Because it wasn't the

Germans that were doing it. It's our neighbors. They took over. They gave them the-- they became the police. They were escorting us.

OK, so there were about 800 of you in the ghetto, and you were all squeezed in pretty tight. And you said you would go to the market once a week for food.

Yeah.

You had money to do this?

They gave us-- well, my father worked on the railroad for the Germans. And they were getting paid with certain scripts, certain monies. And we could spend it. And see, well, we had a grocery store. When we came to the ghetto, we stored away-- we hid so much flour and sugar.

And we brought enough food with us, we could have lived maybe a year, not with everything that you needed, but with enough food that we wouldn't have starved to death. Even without my father working, with the rations that the Germans used to give us, we could really survive.

Was enough flour-- I remember for Yom Kippur, for the fast, my mother was baking challah and all that stuff. She was baking for the neighbors.

So the men that were living in the ghetto worked.

Were working.

They worked outside the ghetto.

Yeah, they used to all work on the railroad. And they got paid with food and maybe some money. I really don't remember that. But I know my father used to bring fish, and salt, and soap, and all that kind of stuff. And then quite a few Polish people used to meet us outside the ghetto.

Like if they had a farm that used to come before-- there was so many different occasions that Polish people-- some were rotten, were ready to kill you, and some were helping you. I mean, I went through that exact experience. Because I was saved by the Polish.

If not for that Polish farmer, that family, I wouldn't have been here today. They took a risk. Because my mother was hidden on a farm with my sister. And the farmer was killed.

There were five Jewish women with children, and a Polish woman from our little town saw them. One night, they were going to bathe, and she just called the police the next day. And they were all shot. And they even shot the farmer. And they liquidated his farm.

So the farmers took big risks too.

They took risks. And the people that saved my life, she had four sons. And they hated my guts. But she was the mother, and she said, I'll stay. And I worked. I mean, they didn't keep me there for nothing. I worked.

We'll get to that in a little bit. I just want to find out a little bit more about the ghetto.

Yeah.

So you had no schooling there.

No.

And how about religious practice?

Living on the farm-- oh, in the ghetto-- nothing.

No religion.

We used to get together-- the men used to gather, like the minyan at night. Nobody even knew, in our house, to come pray.

To your knowledge, did any resistance go on at all in the ghetto?

No.

Did people think about planning?

I don't think they had enough time in the three weeks to form anything. Because we didn't think it's going to last. I mean, we didn't-- we lived with a belief that it's going to get better. And the Germans, every morning--

That it would pass.

Yes. And every morning, you had a flyer, some papers, something was always out that things are going to get wonderful, and not to worry.

So you thought you it was going to get better because the Germans were going to get nicer? Or because Americans were going to come in? Or the Americans weren't in the war yet.

No, no. At my age-- I don't know what my parents thought, but I didn't know about Americans. I just thought that this will just pass.

But that Germany.

Things will be like they were.

That Germany would still be there, but that it would be--

But they'll be nice to us. Because they kept promising us that someday they'll be nice to us. That things are going to get better.

Right. And so the Judenrat was there. And how was that formed? Was it voted who would be the head of the Judenrat?

I have no idea. I'm sure they did it between themselves. Somebody in the town, who was more known and knew more about things, and they just picked him. I remember that man. I think he survived the war. And he's in Israel maybe. I don't know if he's still living, because he was an old man there.

So what was a day-- I mean, you only spent three weeks in the ghetto.

Yeah.

What was a day like for you, a typical day?

For me, it was a typical day. I played with my friends. And we were all so close together, thrown together. And that's all. And the women were cooking and just sitting around. There was nothing. And you didn't think it's going to get worse. You hoped it's going to get better. That will one day, we'll just move out of there.

And my grandparents-- these were my father's parents, who were really never getting along with my mother and my father, they became very close. Because they were older, and my mother was taking care of them.

In times of suffering too, all those--

When you're thrown together like this, you have to make the best of it.

So that went on for three weeks.

Yeah.

And then would you describe how the ghetto was liquidated? What happened?

They just gave them an order to liquidate the ghetto tonight.

Gave who an order?

Somebody gave the police-- the police--

The German police or Polish police.

Our ghettos were policed, by Polish police. And they had an order to liquidate tonight the ghetto, to put them all on horses and buggies, bring them to the shul. And the next day, we'll transport them all to the-- it was special woods in a different town, where they were killing them all.

In the woods?

Yeah, it was a special woods. There was a different town, called [PLACE NAME]. And they took them on a lot of horses and-- not carriages, those big wagons. Like you see the wagons now the cowboys have, the wagons. They weren't covered. They were open. And, of course, when they had them in shul-- see, every shul had a rabbi and a shamash.

That shamash knew about bad things that were happening in different towns. He built a indoor-- in the wall, he built like a hideaway place. And he told a few people there's enough room. And he had bread in there and water. And that's where my father, and the rabbi, and his wife, and his daughter.

And they made a mistake by letting in a woman with a child. And when they came in the next morning to liquidate it, to take him on those horses, the child cried. And they found the wall. And they took them. And, in fact, my girlfriend, the rabbi's daughter, is in Israel today.

See, every town had a rabbi come in like for a couple of years. And they were very new in town. And nobody knew them. And that girl had yellow hair, yellow pigtails. She was very light and blonde. And nobody knew her. Like, my family, everybody knew. Because we lived all our lives in that town. And all the Polish people knew us.

But nobody knew her. And when they took them to be killed, she just ran. And she saw-- she said, when she turned, she saw my father and her father, they were all shot. They put him right in the graves. And they killed him in the graves. And she ran.

And she fell in into one of the graves. And they thought she's dead. And she lied there till she heard quiet and nobody was there. She just walked through the town the next day, straight through, in broad daylight. And she walked to a different farm. And she told them she ran away from a bombed city. She's a Polish girl.

And a Polish family took her in. She worked on the farm. And then when the war was over, she's in Israel. In fact, she was here in New York once. I talked to her, but I didn't see her. But I saw her after the war once in my home town. In



fact, she took me to the graves. We walked, and then we stood there for an hour. And we ran, both of us, so fast. It was in 1945, before I came to this part of Poland.

When the Polish police got orders for the ghetto to be liquidated, so they started rounding-- how did feel about it?

They had orders not to shoot. They had orders just to keep everybody in till the horses will come. They're going to put them on the horses. So a lot of people paid money, and they let you out. My mother and my sister--

Did people know where anyone was going? Did they know what was happening?

Well, every Jew in a little town knew a farmer someplace. And the farms were all around us. Especially most older Jews in the town had little stores. And everybody used to buy from us or trade. So we all had friends. Some of them were friends, and some of them did it for money. And 90 percent--

What did the Jews think were happening when the ghetto was being liquidated? Where did they think they would go?

They knew they were going to get killed.

They did?

Oh, yes. Then they knew they were going to get killed. Because already the few that ran away from different towns, and they told us. But we couldn't get out before. But the night when they announced the day they're going to liquidate the ghetto, whoever could run, ran. A lot of them were killed later, like the next day. But we were on a farm.

What plans did your family make? Did you decide?

My father said-- because we knew all those farmers, my father said to my mother, get dressed. I remember, we dressed with two, three dresses, and extra stockings, and extra coats. And we packed food with us. And we walked. We just walked right out. And we walked like I don't know how many kilometers to the farm. And nobody stopped us.

So all of you.

And my father said he's not going, just my mother, my sister, and myself. My father said--

To the farm?

Yeah.

Of this neighbor that you knew?

Of a farmer that we knew, that we hoped that won't throw us out. But when he found out the next morning-- so he let us sleep over in a barn. The next morning, we sent him-- because we could hear all night screaming. Because they were starting to kill and to shoot. Because people were panicking.

So we sent him to town. And he went to town. And he said, the ghetto-- the whole streets are empty and barricaded. There's not a soul there. So he got scared. And he told us we have to go. I said, where are we going to go? He says, get out.

Do you remember his name?

The Polish--

The farmer.

I don't remember, no. I remember the family that saved my life, their name.

Why didn't your father come with you?

He figured he'll get out. He said it's harder for women. He figured he'll always get out. It's easier for men.

But what was the point of staying on?

Well, my grandparents were there. And there was another child-- his sister's little girl was with him. And he figured he'll help them.

And what happened to them?

They were taken to that shul. And they were all killed.

They were taken to the shul, and then put into the--

The next day--

--in the wagons.

In the wagons, and the next day--

Taken to the wood.

--take them to the woods. And that's where they were-- the graves were all dug for them already.

And would you now tell me, once again, how you heard your father died?

Well, she actually saw him being killed.

Who did?

A girlfriend of mine from my school, who ran away from the dead place. She just was the lucky one to survive. In fact, I have a friend in California, she's a couple of years older than me, she was on that horse and wagon.

And a policeman, a Polish policeman, who had an eye on her before-- she was a teenager in those days-- he took her off. And he figured he'll have her for himself. And I don't know what happened, but she's alive today.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Well, so this friend of yours saw your father killed?

Yeah.

So he was--

He was shot in 1942.

And how was he shot?

He was just shot in the grave. They put them all in the woods. They put them in the grave. And they were shot.

And he was originally in that hiding place, right?

Yeah, and he was the one with the rabbi and his family. I mean, they were all in the shul, but they were in that wall there, the double wall.

And they thought they were secure.

And they thought maybe the next day, they'll get out, and they'll run to a farm too. But they didn't make it.

Because of the baby and the--

Yeah. That's how my mother got killed, because of a child too.

So this was now in October of 1941, that your father was pretty much killed right around then.

Yeah.

So you, and your mother, and your sister-- so you were 12 years old then. And your sister was four.

Yeah.

And you went to--

We went to the farm. And we stayed only overnight. And the next day, he told us to go. So we kept walking. And the Lithuanian and Polish police could spot a Jew a mile away. They just wanted to frighten us. So they started yelling halt, and [LITHUANIAN]. In Lithuanian, it's stop. So more they yelled, more we ran. But they didn't shoot us or nothing.

And then a Polish farmer put us on a wagon, and he took us into a ghetto. See, there were other ghettos, still not liquidated. And we came in that night to the ghetto.

Which ghetto?

We came in a little town called Kiemelishki. It's maybe like 20 miles from our town. And we spent there, I think-- I mean, I spent there-- I was there like, I don't know, maybe a year. I think a year because I was very sick.

My eyes-- I was going blind. And a Polish doctor said if I don't get to a hospital, I'll lose both eyes. And that's when I went through that thing. And he saved my eyes. They dressed me as a Polish girl. They gave me a name and a cross.

Well, why don't you tell me this story. You were in Kiemelishki?

Yeah.

Were you in there with your mother?

In a ghetto, with my mother and my sister.

And your sister.

Yeah, and with cousins. We moved into our house where we had cousins. Everybody had cousins in every town. It was my mother's family.

So this was also a ghetto.

And we were sleeping four in a bed. And it was filthy, dirty. And my eyes-- see, I got sick in my ghetto. I had like an eye infection. And when I ran away that night, instead of putting cold compresses, I found some dirty water.

And that's when my eyes really got infected. The cold water helped the heat out, but my eyes were completely covered with pus. And when I came into the other ghetto, and I just couldn't open my eyes.

The Polish farmer took you into that ghetto?

That Polish farmer, a complete stranger, nothing to do with the house where we stayed, just somebody that we knew. He says he'll take a chance. He put us in sacks of potatoes, like. Covered us up and just--

And he was doing this just--

--walked in with us.

--to help you.

Yeah.

Not for money or anything?

No, we didn't have anything then to give him, nothing.

So you were living in this ghetto.

Yeah. And that's when my eyes were very bad. And the Polish doctor said to my mother, if she can just arrange enough money to get a sled-- it was winter already-- a sled. And they'll take me over a frozen lake to the big city of Vilna, to the biggest eye hospital, called [NON-ENGLISH]-- a very big hospital. And he says, maybe they'll save one eye. He says and don't be disappointed.

She says, we want to save her life. And my mother sold her wedding ring, whatever she had. And whoever could help in the ghetto, and everybody knew I'll come back at least with one eye gone. And I spent 17 days in that hospital. My name was Christina Boroduvna I had a big cross. I didn't know anything about the religion.

But every morning in the hospital, they used to kneel and pray. So I used to stay on my knees and count until everybody sit down. And I was there for-- it was a hospital. There were Russian prisoners there and Polish prisoners. And I could see in the room there were a lot of Jewish women, hiding like me. But I was a kid.

And after 17 days, I had both eyes, no surgery. They did it with a ultra ray lights. I had abscesses on my pupils. And the doctor-- when they released me, the doctor said to my doctor-- because he came back with a horse and sled and picked me up, the doctor. That doctor, if he's anyplace alive, it's unbelievable.

What was his name?

I don't remember. Would you believe it, I don't remember.

You were 12 years old at the time.

I don't remember. But he had no children. And he told my mother-- he says, anytime-- he says, if something happens to you, she'll be brought up like a doctor's daughter. She'll never lack of anything. We'll educate her, and don't worry.

Because the thing I'm telling you now-- when I came back-- when I left the hospital, the doctor said that I have-- the most important thing, I have to have cleanliness. Ad I come back to the ghetto. There's four of us in one bed-- excuse me-- with lice, with fleas, with everything. And I have to put in that special salve in my eyes and drops.

So my mother goes to the doctor, says, look, she's not going to last much longer if she doesn't have anything happen fast. Can't you take her at least for a week to your house? That's how much chutzpah and how much she wanted me to survive and to see.

He says, I'll go home tonight-- and he lived like in a mansion. Not a farm, but in Europe they used to have-- the rich Poles used to have homes.

How did your mother meet him?

They just sent us to the clinic, to the doctor. And he was the Polish doctor. And he told my mother--

In the ghetto?

Well, he was out of the ghetto, but we could go out of the ghetto to go to the doctor. For four months, my eyes were bandaged. My mother used to walk me like a dog to him. And he took me in. And the next day, he told my mother to meet us in a certain woods at night.

I remember the moon was shining. And he took me in. And they gave me my own room, with the nightgowns. And everybody was going to tutor me. And I was there for 10 days. I thought I was in heaven again. I couldn't believe that that exists. And as a kid, I said-- a mother would really die to live like this or her child.

But as a child, you just-- I wanted so much to survive, and to see, and to live like this. And I never dreamed that my mother would get killed or anything. And after 10 days, he knocked on my door one day, and he says he has something to tell me. And the tears were coming down his eyes.

He says, I have to tell you, you have to go back to the ghetto. He says, they're going to come here, where somebody squealed that he's hiding Jews, and that he's hiding Polish officers that ran away from the war. And he says, you cannot stay.

I said, where am I going to go? He says, your mother is still in the ghetto. He says, I'll walk you as far as I can, and then you're on your own. And I thought I'm going to die. And I walk into the ghetto--

And when was this?

That had to be-- that all had to be in '42. Like, maybe-- it was cold. There wasn't snow, but it was like maybe November or December. It was very cold.

You mean like the end--

Either at the end of '42, or maybe it was '43 already. I don't--

Wait one second. The ghetto-- the first ghetto was liquidated in Yom Kippur of '41.

'41, yeah.

And then you went to the other ghetto.

Yeah.

And you had that eye operation.

Yeah, no operation--

Not operation, you were in a hospital.

Yeah.

When did that happen after you moved to the ghetto? The second ghetto?

You mean the eye thing?

Yeah.

Oh, that happened-- that happened right away. Because I couldn't see. I was so sick. I started-- I didn't tell you that I got sick in my ghetto with the eyes. I had an inflammation. And I just had to go out. I couldn't do anything about it. So that happened. I can't remember dates. I just remember it was so cold when we walked.

Maybe it was in like February of '42.

Could be.

Could have been, still winter.

Could be-- yeah, winter. And I come to the ghetto, and all the Polish police left. There's no police. So the Polish farmers and people-- the Pollacks, they're breaking the windows in the ghetto, and they're robbing, and they're stealing. And the women are crying and screaming. And I'm walking into this.

And my mother turns around, and she sees me, she almost died. She said, what is she doing here? I thought at least she'll survive. So all night, nobody slept. The next morning, Polish farmers are coming from all over to help, with food. And that farmer, who took me away that day. I never stayed another day in that ghetto.

And while I was on the farm-- I worked on another farm, who took my mother and my sister to his farm.

Now wait one second now. This farmer came in that day and took you to his farm.

That farmer came in just to bring some food for some Jews. He met people outside the ghetto. And his wife was the biggest anti-Semite. She hated Jews. Because I remember her, when she used to come to our store. She was a real-- when he told her that he wants to take me, she almost died.

But when he told her that I'm old enough, and I can work on the farm, and the garden, and in the fields, he came back, and he says his wife said, OK. And my mother begged him to take my sister. She was only four or five years old then. But she wouldn't leave my mother anyways.

So he took you.

He took me.

And your mother-- and your mother and sister stayed.

Stayed on, and they stayed on there for another few days. I mean, nothing happened. They liquidated-- like a week later, they killed everybody. But that week still-- my mother got to like a brother of that farmer, with my sister.

But that farmer wanted more Jews than my mother. Because he hoped that someday they'll leave him-- whatever they have, it'll be his. And whatever they had, they gave him anyways, at the time. And he took him too many.

And they had to bathe. They had to wash. He kept them there. My mother was killed only six months before the war was over.

So your mother was there--

She lived there for quite a few years.

And how about your sister?

She was with her all the time. And it happened one Easter Sunday-- my farmer drove me all the way to see my mother. And if I would sleep over that night, I would have been dead with them. When it's meant to be alive, you live.

So you went to visit your mother.

I went to visit my mother. I spent a day and a night. And the next morning, they picked me up and took me back to the other farm. And the next night, they caught them.

The Germans or Poles?

The Polish police.

Came and found them.

And arrested them. Kept them in jail overnight. And then they took them to Vilna. I don't know-- I'm sure you heard of the Ponary in Vilna, where all the-- where the blood was oozing. And they didn't bury the people even. Most of the Jews from around Vilna were killed on the Ponary. That's where they were killed.

And how about the Polish farmer?

They killed her husband. See, they walked in the house, and they saw warm beds. And he had that wall built for them. So they knew they were there. And they yelled at him. And he had epilepsy. So they started beating him.

And he had an attack. And they dropped him. They choked him. And maybe they killed him right there and then. I don't know what happened. Her son ran away, and they didn't touch her.

And they started shooting in the air. And the kids-- there were a couple of kids in that thing, and they started crying. And they got them.

OK, so you were taken to this farmer's house in about '42.

Yeah, that's where I stayed.

And were there-- and what was their name?

Zemo.

That's the last name?

Zemo was the last name.

How do you spell that?

That would be spelled Z, with a dot on top-- E-M-O.

And it was a farmer and his wife?

No, it was just a woman with four sons. Her husband was dead. One son was married, and three were still single. One was a lawyer that came just certain times of the year home, to visit. And the others worked the farm.

But I thought the farmer took you back?

He took me back where?

When he went to the-- he had to go ask his wife. You said that--

Oh, that wasn't that farmer. My mother was on a different farm. That farmer that took me the first time from the second ghetto, he took me, and I stayed with him one year. And then-- he we lived very close to our town. He was so scared that they're going to catch me someday, working in the fields, and somebody will recognize me.

He took me on another farm, which was [PLACE NAME], where the Polish president was. But that's where I ended my hiding place. That was his sister-in-law, that he took me further away, like 14 kilometers.

And that was Zemo?

That was Zemo. The first one was Yuzefovich, I remember.

Yuzefovich?

Yuzefovich.

And you stayed there for a year.

I stayed the first year, when he took me from the ghetto, from Kiemelishki.

And it was he and his wife.

Yeah.

And did they have any children?

They had two daughters. And I'll tell you how I came to go to Poland, because of one daughter. She did me a favor. How I left the farm-- the reason I left the farm, I hated it. When the war was over, and the Russians came in again, in 1944, at the end of '44, I had no place to go. But I heard that a few Jews survived.

And they were so wonderful to me, the farmer, and her sons. And they said, stay here. I was baptized-- during the three years, I was in a church. And they baptized me and the whole works. They said otherwise I can't live with them.

This was at the farm of Zemo.

At the farm of Zemo in [PLACE NAME]. And they told me, why do I want to go now? After all, everybody is dead, and I don't have to work as hard. Someday, I'll get married, you know. And I had no place to go. But I hated the farm. So every day, I used to hitchhike with a Russian truck into our little town.

And the few Jews that were there-- and I came in, I had coffee. I ate with them, I drank with them. But nobody told me to stay. And I met a Jewish boy, who was in the Russian army. He was a Lieutenant. He wasn't a boy, he was then 29 years old. And I was 15. And he says to me, where are you? I said, I live on a farm. He says, you live on a farm? A Jewish girl today shouldn't live on a farm.

Was this after the war?



After the war. And he says because a lot of Polish people used to kill the Jews when they went back to the farms to collect their belongings or something. I said, well, I have no place to go. He says, well-- he says, if you can get a place to stay, I'll get you a job.

He says, I am in charge of a bakery for the army. He says, you're too young to work, officially. He says, but who says you have to be there officially? He says you'll get so much food a day, as long as you have a place to stay.

So my farmer's daughter, who lived in town, I paid her a bread a day, and she let me live with her. And you know how I got the bread? I stole the bread. I was watching the soldiers they shouldn't steal. But I stole it. I didn't get any bread. I didn't think I'm doing anything wrong.

And when I told him what I'm doing, he says you want me and you to go to Siberia? You're in charge to watch. And I was so proud what I was doing. I was telling everybody what I'm doing-- I mean, all my Jewish friends there.

And so I lost the job. And the week I lost the job, a lady, who survived with her husband and her daughter, who she's in Montreal today. Her husband is dead already. Her husband was arrested by the Russians, and she was scared to death to live alone. And she begged me to live with her. And she said, someday, maybe we'll all go to Israel together. Why didn't you stay with me?

And I was the type, I never wanted charity. From the day I was liberated-- I could have gone to an orphanage after the war. There was plenty of orphanages.

This was after the war.

After the war.

OK, let me ask you-- we'll talk about that, but I just want to find out a little bit more also about your hiding experiences, OK?

Yeah.

When you were at that first place for-- rather, the farm.

I would say the first, maybe I was there, maybe six months.

And he was scared that--

They were very scared, because our-- in fact, the Jewish cemetery was around the corner from him. And everybody in the little town knew-- especially if you had a grocery-- all the Polish people knew us. And they knew me and my parents. And he was scared. He thinks that people recognize me when I was sitting in the gardens, cleaning up the cucumbers or whatever doing there.

And he decided-- he talked over with his sister, who lived like 14 kilometers. And that's when he moved me there. And she said, OK. I didn't look Jewish. That's one thing was a plus for me. I didn't speak Jewish, because I was brought up with Polish people all the time.

My mother was always working. So I always-- I mean, I knew how to speak Jewish, but I very little used it. And when I went to the other farm, nobody knew me. I could walk alone in the farms, in the fields, nobody knew who I was.

In the first farm, was he hiding anyone else?

No.

You were the only one.

I was the only one.

And what did you do? You worked in the fields?

I worked in the fields, milked the cows. They didn't have a big farm. The one I finished my hiding, that was a big one. We had like 20 cows, and 20 pigs, and a big-- a lot of land.

Did they give you enough to eat?

Oh, yeah. Whatever they ate-- they never gave me-- I ate whatever they ate.

So you just--

After my mother was killed, that's when things were tough. Because they were afraid. Not because they wanted to be mean to me. They were afraid to keep me in the house. I had to move out. I had to sleep in the barn at night.

This was the second hiding place.

The last hiding--

Zemo.

Yeah.

OK, so the first hiding place, you were there like about six months. And then they just decided it was too dangerous.

Yes. Too dangerous for them.

Right. But at the first hiding place, in terms of food, and clothing, and everything, you were OK.

Yeah.

And these were people that your mother had known.

Yeah, these are-- all those farmers knew my parents.

Because of the store.

Yeah.

So after about six months later-- this must have been maybe in the summer of '42 or something, or September of '42?

I would say that was already in '43.

In '43.

Yeah.

You were taken to Zemo.

Yeah.

And there, it was just a woman.

A woman and four sons.

Four sons.

In a big, big house, a big barn, and a lot of animals, a lot of everything.

Were there anyone else hiding there?

No.

And why did they take you?

Because of the brother. They did it for their brother. I didn't know those farmers at all. But we knew the brother. My parents were wonderful to them all the time. And the brother just did it. The man that took me from that ghetto, Kiemelishki. He was a wonderful man. His wife was just a Jew hater. She hated everybody.

But he was a wonderful man. He just-- one of those old men, with a big mustache. And he was just good. And his sister was the same way.

In fact, after all that good that the doctor did me in the hospital, on that last farm my eyes got so bad, and I couldn't get to a doctor. And she just cured me, like a miracle cure.

She just used to sit with me every night-- we had no electricity on those farms-- with steam. Every night, when everybody went to bed, she used to light a fire, put a kettle on the fire, and the steam go into my eyes and take away the heat and whatever was there.

So you were about 13 then?

Yeah. I think I must have been almost 14. Yeah.

And how old were her four sons? Were they young?

The youngest was then 28--

Oh, so they--

--the youngest.

--were all old.

Oh, yeah, they were all-- one was married, and one was an old bachelor, in his late 30s.

Did they all live on the farm?

The one was 28, they always thought that some day he'll marry me.

Oh, really?

They used to say that. Yeah, someday, Jamek will marry you. His name was Jamek.

And all four of them lived on the farm?

No, three of them-- the married one, he didn't-- he was married while I was there. It was a big wedding too. I had to go

through with that wedding. I had to hide, and I wanted to be at the wedding. Because a lot of people came from my hometown for the wedding. So I had to hide.

And the son-- the lawyer-- happened to come there for certain holidays. He used to come. He lived in a big city. And there was one, he was like a policeman. They were such-- and they used to call me every name in the book. But when I think of it, how much they hated me, but they never would give me out. Or maybe they were afraid to give me out because it would happen to them too.

How did your mother respond? How did their mother respond when they would attack you like that?

She wouldn't say nothing. She just used to comfort me afterwards. She was just wonderful. We had an incident once on that farm. Two Germans came in in the morning to our farm for eggs, two German officers. And they had their eggs. And when they were walking back, they were killed by the partisans.

There was all woods there, and there was a lot of partisans-- Russians, and Polish, and maybe Jewish, I don't know. They were shot. So they announced that night that all the farms are going to burn. They're going to burn them up. So they said to me, you get out of the house. I shouldn't be in the house at night at all.

Because I used to come in at night, warm up. Used to give me food. Because once my parents were killed-- my mother was killed, I couldn't sleep in the house anymore. And it was winter. I remember, it was so white. The moon was shining. And I said, I'm not going. I'm scared. I'm not going alone. She says, you have to get out.

So they all picked themselves up. I didn't even know when-- and they walked out. And they ran out. And they left me alone in the house. And no lights, and just the moon. And the snow made it so bright. And I'm going out. I'm alone in the house. I'm so scared. I figured, they must be in the woods. I'm running.

When I started to run-- when you walk in snow, when you run in snow, how much noise that makes. They thought they're being chased. And I knew it was them. And I kept running, and they were running. We went around in circles. And we all wound up back in the house.

And I'll never forget how she took me-- in Poland, on the farms, you used to bake bread in the ovens. And on top, it was very warm. It was made from cement. And that's where I slept before I had to get out of the house. And you could die from the heat there at night.