

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview of Jadwiga Dziekonski conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 21, 1997, in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is tape number 1, side A. What is your full name?

My full name is Jadwiga Dziekonski.

And what was your maiden name, your family name?

Chybinksi. Chybinksi.

Where were you born?

I was born in Human. And after two years when it was Bolshevik Revolution, my parents and myself and my sister came to Poland.

Where was this town that you were born in located?

It's not very far from Kiev.

How long had your parents' family been in that area? Or were they in that area initially?

All the time after partitions of Poland. We get three partitions of Poland. My mother's family had estates around Human. And the grandfather of my father had estates around Kiev. So it was Ukraine in Polish Podolia. And they lived there until 1917.

What kind of work did your father do?

My father was a chemical engineer, as they say in this country, doctor of chemistry.

And when you said his family had estate, what did they grow? Or did they raise?

Oh, it was a very long time ago. I have no idea. Everything grows in Ukraine.

What were your parents' names?

My parents' name? Chybinski.

Their first names.

Oh, Karol and Helena.

And you said you had a sister. Is she older or younger?

She's no longer alive. She was older. Her name was Maria.

How much older was she?

Two years.

And so you said you were born in that town and then your family moved in 1921.

No-- in 19-- yes, 17 and 2, 1919.

You were born in 1919?

Mm, hmm. And then they moved.

So you moved as a very young child to Warsaw. Why did your family pick that particular place to move to?

I have no idea. I don't know.

And did you have extended family in that small town? Or did you have extended family in Warsaw?

No, I didn't have an extended family in Warsaw. Well, later on, everybody had family who came from different parts of Poland because of the situation.

How politically oriented was your father and mother?

They were independent. And they were-- at the time, they were very great admirer of Piłsudski That's all I can say.

When your family moved to Warsaw, what part of the city did they settle in? Was it in the center of the town or the outskirts?

Yes, it was in the center of the town.

Can you describe a little bit more where it was?

Well, it was very close to Children's Hospital and very close to a very nice park. And my father started working with the printing company, which wasn't very far, because Warsaw at the time had factories which were not doing any harm to the environment. So that doesn't mean that we have to have miles away from Warsaw. So he worked, and we were there.

What is your first memory of Warsaw?

My first memory is the park, which was a very beautiful park, especially interested in fruits. So there were beautiful fruit trees. This is my first memory going there.

How would you describe the neighborhood that you lived in? Was it a middle class neighborhood? Upper class?

Yes, it was middle class, definitely.

And let's talk about your schooling. How old were you when you started school?

Well, the usual, seven years. And then I was in school until I was 16. And then from Warsaw, I was sent to Hrabka, which is not far from Zakopane, which is in the mountains. And then there, I finished school.

We'll get to that in a minute. So you began school at the age of 7. Was this a public school?

Yes.

And was it boys and girls?

No, just girls. It was 60 years ago.

So you began school. And did you have other interests as a young child? In elementary school, were you interested in sports or music?

I was always interested in music. And I was interested in everything. So that's why when I finished I wanted to go to the School of Journalism. You don't become a journalist because you go to school, but there were all subjects that were

interesting. So that's why I went.

Did you play any musical instruments?

No. I played piano badly. It doesn't count.

And what about sports?

Skiing. It was all.

Now, in your neighborhood, were there any Jewish families?

I don't think so. I have Jewish girlfriends in school. But I didn't know their families.

So they didn't come to your house and you didn't go to their house?

No, we were so little we didn't pay attention to visiting each other. We had enough in school.

All right, and so then you got a little bit older.

Yes. And when I was a little bit older, then the-- what is it's called-- the high school was very nice as far as Jewish girls. And I was very friendly with them. We visited each other. And from that time, I have my best friend, who is still alive. And we correspond. She is the daughter of a man who was very active in Polish Socialist Party. And his wife was Jewish. They loved her. Elena's mother, in other words, my friend's mother, had a father in Warsaw. And he was just marvelous. He was Jewish, of course. And the name was Lipschitz.

So now, she is very happy the fact I remember her grandfather, because he was lovely. So we were very happy together. And when she comes here from where she lives in Warsaw, then we spend time together. And she has put to herself as an important goal in life to collect all writings of her father. And she almost succeeded. She had letters, and she had other of his writings put into books.

And her name is Elena Lipschitz?

No, Elena, she was married, and her husband was a very, very famous mountain climber. And in an accident, he died. So she married again and not very fortunately. The name is Blatten. And she separated with this man, so she is alone now and has a daughter.

How religious was your family?

Very religious Roman Catholic.

So what kind of religious training did you have as a child?

At school. That's enough. In Poland, that's enough.

When you say-- but it was a public school.

Yes. And then it was private. In Hrabka, near Zakopane, it was private.

So you had religious training at school?

Yes. I had religious training at school. And in Hrabka, the three women who took care of the school were brought up by the, they called them, the Sacred Heart. And they were not nuns. They were very, very sophisticated and fun. But they did have priest visiting. The priest who was in charge of Laski for blind people was coming there for retreats. So we

were happy Catholics with no bigotry attached. So that was lovely.

When you were getting your Catholic training at school, what were the Jewish students doing?

They were no Jewish students in the school in Hrabka.

Oh, so you didn't get any Catholic training in elementary school?

No, that was their religious lessons, that's all, you know. There was physics, Polish, and other language, and religion.

Because you said there were Jewish students in the elementary school.

Mm-hmm.

And so they were taking the same religion courses that you were.

No, I think that probably they took some religious courses with their parents. I have no idea. I didn't think in this way. They were so much fun, I didn't think what they are learning as far as religion.

What kind of activities did you do with them?

Oh, we were just regular play, you know, extracurriculars and so forth.

Did you go to church often?

Yes, every Sunday. Mm-hmm.

OK, now you said you graduated and you went to the next school.

Mm-hmm.

And for how long were you there?

We were talking about elementary, and now we're talking about high school, right?

Yes.

Well, eight years.

You were eight years in elementary school.

No, no, no, eight years in the high school, or whatever it's called now. It is called lyceum now.

And that's the school near Zakopane?

In the school near Zakopane was where I got baccalaureate. There were two years after. It's called the small baccalaureate in Poland now. I don't know what it's called here, basic high school.

Why did you go to a different town to school?

Because my family thought that I have something wrong with my lungs. And this was very good for way lungs to go there in the mountains. So if it was or it wasn't, I was very happy.

Did you have health problems as a child?

Yes, I did. I had something which was collected with my lungs. I didn't actually have any TB or anything like that, but we went to the south of France because I was so weak. And that was all. It finished. It was very short lived, fortunately.

Now, you said when you were growing up in Warsaw, you had Jewish friends. You played with them. Did you notice any incidents while you were out in the city of antisemitism? Or did you sense it?

No. No, of course not. Poland was not antisemitic.

OK. And now you're, what, about 18, 19 years old, and then what happened?

After that, it was very close to the war in 1939. My husband, my fiancée then, went to war.

Well, OK, let's talk a little bit about that now. How did you meet your--

My husband?

Well, let's talk about anything in 1936. Well, also--

1937, I finished in 1937.

You finished.

Hitler came into power in 1933. Did your parents talk about that?

About what?

Hitler came into power in 1933 in Germany.

Well, of course, my parents talked--

Do you remember what kind of remarks they made.

I do remember very well. They hated him. They didn't how to hate. But they knew how very bad he was for his country and for everybody around. So--

And how aware were you? You were only 14 years old at that time.

No, I was 16.

In 1933?

19 and 16, what is it now?

OK, you are a teenager.

Well, I was adult at 14.

Why do you say you are an adult?

Because I thought that as an adult.

In what way?

In what-- in every way. That means interested in the art, interested in politics, interested in the history, everything. That's what I mean that I was adult.

What were you some of your feelings at that age about politics?

My feelings about politics were very, very easily described as being-- well, I wasn't actually afraid of Hitler, but being very anxious that his power doesn't grow, that he will be stopped, very much interested in people who are opposed him in Germany. So that's what I mean by adult.

What languages did you speak at that time?

Polish.

Did you understand German then?

No. And I wasn't interested.

So you couldn't understand his words?

No, but they were all translated. It didn't make any difference.

OK. And were you aware-- in, let's say, the fall of 1938 when Kristallnacht happened, was that something that you and your family were aware of?

Of course, yes, we were.

What was your response or your parents' response?

Well, obviously, the despair and tragedy of this all.

How did you meet your husband?

I met my husband through my later aunt's brother-in-law, because they were friends and they lived together. And it didn't matter that my husband was so much older. And I was very much interested. So I tried to hook him.

What was your husband's name?

My husband's name was ZdziesÅ,aw, unpronouncable, except people think that it's like [? Jayswaf ?] in French. But anyhow, ZdziesÅ,aw, Z-D-Z-I-E-S-L-A-W, So it is very difficult.

And how much older was he?

13 years.

Where was his family from?

His family was from Podlachia. Podlachia is a part of Poland in-- how shall I say that will be easily understood? In the north and center, center Poland. In the north, towards the north.

Near any bigger city?

Bialystok.

And what kind of work did your husband do?

He was a lawyer.

What kind of law did he practice?

He was practicing law in the organization-- how shall I say-- in the firm, which was taking care of the country's problem-- in other words, the government's cases against some people who are they are litigating or who were trespassing the law. So it was called the Prokuratora Generalnego. But it has nothing to do with the Prokuratora. It was just-- in other words, taking care of cases which were supposed to be bad for the country. I was speaking very, very primitive way, because I really didn't sleep well. But it is-- anyhow, the interests and the goal of the cases, which were not right for the government, for the country, actually. Not for the government's this and that, but for the country. I don't know how-- it doesn't exist in America or in England or in France, maybe in Belgium.

And again, how political was your husband? Did he have any particular political leanings?

He had very strong political ideas. And he was in a group of young people who were called the Youth of the Nation. And he was a very avid boy scout. When he was six, he was already a boy scout. So he was going to all international-- what do you call it?

Conventions or conferences.

No, the scouts, what do they do? I know the Polish name, but I can't think of it. I'll just think of it in a minute. When for the birds fly and they go into one place, this is a zlot. In other words-- I have to look it up, because it must be very easy in English. And then meetings, international meetings of different places in Hungary, in England, in Ireland, in France. So he was very busy with this, along with his work.

So even as an adult, he stayed active?

Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed, even in here.

So he was a scout as a child, but he stayed in the movement--

Yes--

Even as he got older.

Right.

And so you met. And then how long was it before you became engaged and got married?

Well, I became engaged right before the war. And we married in 1941, because we decided that the war is never going to end. So in 1938, he was my fiancée. And in '39, he went to look for the Polish army, which were meanwhile dissipated. And then he came back and stayed with me and my mother. And then, 1941, we married.

Well, let's talk a little bit about 1939, because that was a very special year. The war began in September.

Yes.

What do you recall about the German invasion in Poland, in Warsaw?

Well, I recall what everybody does. That means that the German armies went in and just took Poland by storm, and England and France were thinking if they will help, when they thought it was over. It was over, Poland was under German occupation.

What were your feelings as a young woman when you saw German soldiers in the streets and the destruction and so forth?

I hated the occupation. I hated the occupation. I was so hopeful that maybe one day we will throw it off.

And then from what I understand, Warsaw surrendered in September 28, 1939. What was that day like for you?

Well, it was awful, but it was hard to criticize, because there was no army to fight.

Was your husband with you at that time in September?

In September, no, he was going towards Russia, because there were some parts of Polish army which were still-- not available-- which was still gathering there. But he didn't succeed. And they were just going to Romania, where temporarily the government was, the Polish government.

Had he been mobilized?

No, he was in reserve. He didn't have eyesight in one eye. So from the first time, he was 16. It didn't show, but he didn't-- but he did everything. He could drive a car. He could play tennis.

But he wasn't called up and mobilized into the army?

No, no. He was going by himself trying to find the army, the remnants of the army.

So you're remaining behind with your mother--

Mm-hmm--

In Warsaw--

And my sister--

And your sister. And then what was the next thing that you remember?

The next thing I remember is that he came back. And then--

When was that?

Well, he came in 1941. So that's when we married.

So all of the rest of 1939 and all of 1940, he was gone?

No, actually he came in 1940. I'm sorry. Yes, then we married in 1941.

What did you do? Were you working? What were you doing at the time of the occupation?

At this time, I didn't work. I wasn't required an Ausweis. Later on, I had to work, or else I'll be shipped to Germany for labor, hard labor.

So you are now 20 years old.

Uh, huh.

And what did you do?



And then I was pregnant. My daughter was born in 1943.

No, no, no, let's back up. We're still in 19--

Well, 1941--

No, no, no, it's just 1940. I want to take this year by year.

Oh, I see.

OK, we're just in 1940.

I'm sorry.

Yeah. And so what did you do? The Germans came in, and you said you had to work.

No, I didn't work in 1940. No.

What did you do?

I was staying with my family.

And you're 21 years old now.

Right.

And you were just at home.

Well, 21 in 1940--

Mm-hmm.

That's funny. Well, oh, I stayed at home. Mm-hmm.

OK. And what was it like for you to see German soldiers on your streets?

Horrible, obvious. Everybody hates them.

Were you frightened of them?

No. Why should I be frightened? No, I wasn't afraid of them.

What was your relationship to your Jewish friends in the beginning of the occupation?

I didn't have other Jewish friends around at beginning of the occupation. They were not in Warsaw.

Had you heard of any repressive decrees by Hitler? Were you aware at that time of any repressive decrees by Hitler against the Jews?

Well, of course, it started. It started and we all heard about it.

Did you talk this over with your parents or with friends? What were people's reaction?

The people's reaction was just as mine. And that means that we share it with horror, and we were just thinking what to do to be able to help. And my father was already gone across Romania to Portugal and then from there to London, because he was evacuated with the Polish bank. He was making money this way. My husband married me, he thought it was more for me.

Anyhow, so he was evacuated with the Polish bank, Band of Poland, as it was called. And they went to London by the way of Portugal. So I was with my mother and my sister, Marysia.

And so this is 1940.

Mm-hmm.

And you're in touch with your fiancée.

Right.

And then you said--

He came back, and then we married.

When did you get married?

In 1941, in June.

In June of 1941. What kind of wedding did you have?

Had a wedding-- Warsaw was ruined, not as much as in 1944, but ruined. And we were not well to do it. And we didn't have any money. So we were very happy. And we married. And we were married in church. And after that we were just happy that we were married. That's all. The kind of wedding in a suit, navy suit for me, dark suit for him. And that was all. No long dresses.

Did you have any kind of reception?

No. No, we had just friends, friends for dinner.

What's it like to get married in a city that's occupied and you see parts of it being damaged and destroyed? What is it like for a young bride?

It's very sad. But then I'm so happy that I married that I don't pay attention. And I hope that Warsaw will be rebuilt. Little did I know that will be ruined to the ground.

Did you pick up any of the German language by then?

No, I was in school of journalism, which was in 1938, because one year after I finished school, I didn't do anything. I went to art school. And just enjoyed myself. But after that, I went to school of journalism, because it was interesting for me because of the different subjects. And I say I didn't want to be a journalist, but I went to school. And after a year, that was not the time for going to school, because that was 1939. So that was the end of--

Where was this journalism school located, in Warsaw?

Right, in Warsaw. It was a very good school and very good professors, one who was teaching Polish history, Polish art, and everything Poland, who was Jewish. And I loved him. And there were other very good professors, very good.

Was there any talk among these academics and fellow students of your of any kind of resistance at that time in 1938 to

Hitler.

If it was-- if it were, I should say-- this is better English-- then, of course, it was secret.

Were you aware of any of the talk?

Of course, but I wasn't part of it, because my husband wouldn't let me. And he was already in the underground. But I didn't know.

At that point, you didn't know. What was he--

No, I never knew--

What was he doing-- now that it's all over-- what was he doing at that point?

At this point, he was working as a clerk in [? osterdamer ?] [? starpuk. ?] And he was--

What is that?

That is the-- osterdamer is a car. [? Osterdamer ?] is a car. So it was representative of car, car dealer. And he was in the workshop. So that he could have his Ausweis.

But all about his work underground was unknown to me. He didn't want to put me to any kind of danger. So when there were Germans going and stopping and picking up people from their houses, apartments, whatever, he would go-- it was once I remembered he went to bed and said, tell whoever comes that I'm very sick. Well, that wouldn't prevent the Germans picking him up. But they didn't. We were lucky.

The only other thing that was dangerous was that he was working-- was he working or-- no, he went to the electrical company, the shop-- well, workshop and the store. And then the Germans came and were picking up everybody. And they didn't pick up the workers for some reason. So a man seeing them in the distance gave him a kind of uniform. So he pretended to be the worker. And they didn't take the workers this time. Amazing.

Did your husband speak German?

Yes, he did a little, mm-hmm. Not fluently, but quite--

Now, you said he was a lawyer.

Mm-hmm.

So why was he working in this automobile factory?

Because this was the only thing available. There were no legal firms in Warsaw. That was the only available work.

You're saying that the Germans had abolished--

Mm-hmm--

This?

Right. So he wanted his Ausweis. And he got it. And I was then working in a factory which made bouillon cubes. That means that they made it, and we--

Wrapped them up--

We wrapped them up. Now I can't wrap a package, gift package.

After you got married, did you stay at your mother's house or did you--

No, I went to Warsaw.

But you were in Warsaw.

No, my mother was about 18 kilometers from Warsaw in the house which we rented when we were on vacation, and she stayed there.

And where was that located?

Hmm, it was located in Chyliczki. Chyliczki, Chyliczki, it's easier.

So that's where you lived with your mother. And then when you got married, you came back to Warsaw to live with your husband.

That's right.

And you said you were working in a factory in Warsaw.

Yes.

Wrapping bouillon cubes.

Yes.

And your husband was working in an automobile factory.

Yes, that's what I wanted to have the Ausweis for.

An Ausweis is?

Ausweis is the identification of work.

These are you're working papers--

Working papers, right, mm-hmm.

And you needed these working papers--

Of course.

Why?

Because they take all young people to hard labor in Germany.

Did you ever see anybody being taken away?

Well, not physically, but I knew about people who were. Oh, yes.

Did you have any good friends who were taken away?

No, fortunately not.

What's it like to hear that people are being taken away?

Awful, because it will still become a camp for hard labor. They have all possibilities. They just take these people from the places where they worked to the camp.

OK. Did you ever see any or did you know that Jews were specifically being targeted at that point?

I didn't see anybody. But it was not far from the time when we were hiding our friends, the Jewesses. But I didn't-- how shall I say it? Everybody talked about it. So we knew about it, that the Jews are the center of their terrible activities and persecution. So we knew that. That's why we asked Eugenie Kassel-- Kassel her name was. And her mother's name was, I'm not sure, but I think that her name was Sylvia. I didn't have too much to do with her, because she couldn't stand the hiding. And she asked if she could just go for a walk, which we said, no. But she did, and she never came back.

I'd like to talk about that and more in detail a little bit later. The Jews in Warsaw--

Right--

Some of these were your friends as you were a child. But did you have any contact with them?

No. No, at the time. They were mostly the servers, the ones that I knew. So I didn't have any contact with them.

This is tape number 1, side B of the interview of Jadwiga Dziekonski. Did you see Jews on the street with armbands and any identifying markings?

Yes, I did. I did, not to many because we were in a different part of the city.

Did you feel free to talk to them on the street?

I never talk to strangers. I'm not in America. Here I do. No, I didn't talk to them. I didn't want to endanger them. Some German will come and just tell them to stop or hit them or something. Jewish people were nothing for them. No, it wasn't possible.

And again, what thoughts were going through your head when you knew this kind of treatment?

Well, the thoughts that I was feeling so much with them and so sorry for their being persecuted. So, you know, it was just very, very, very difficult to bear.

Now, your husband was working in the resistance at the time. But you said out of your safety and his safety, he didn't want to tell you.

Mm-hmm.

I mean, later on, did he tell you way after the war, so you can tell us now what kind of work he was doing in the resistance?

Yes, I can tell you. He was teaching. He was writing, writing a bulletin. He was teaching younger people to do-- well, there wasn't too much, on this part, there wasn't too much of military approach, because there were others for that. He was just teaching them and telling them everything that's all about and actually having some subjects in school, which they had some resistance school, and the writing, writing a bulletin.

What particular resistance group was he a part of?

AK. AK stands for Armia Krowoja, which stands for the Army of the Country, literally translated.

And did he have any kind of leadership role in the AK-- is that how you pronounce it?

Yes, he did. Mm-hmm.

Did he have a title?

Well, he was lieutenant.

Did he go by his own name or did he have a pseudonym.

No, he had a pseudonym.

What was that?

Two of them. His first was Grajewski, because he used to live in the Grajewo, which is also not far from where he was born. And the other one was Eagle.

An eagle.

A Polish eagle, yes. So these were two that he went by.

How do you explain his bravery in working for the resistance?

How does one explain the bravery? Love of the country. He was not brave. He didn't have any physical courage. When he was in the uprising, of which we'll come, he was very much afraid. But that was the whole point. First of all, he didn't think that the uprising is going to succeed. So that is very difficult, because lots of his friends, his colleagues, thought that we will win, German over. So though he doesn't have any physical courage, but he was brave because he loved his country.

Now, it's 1941, '42--

Right.

And you said you had a daughter?

Yes.

When was she born?

She was born in 1943. Yes.

And her name?

Christine.

So she was born in Warsaw.

Yes.

What were the conditions of giving birth in Warsaw at that time?

The conditions required bravery, because the nurse said I will come back, because it was about 15 hours and I didn't lose the will. I'll come back when you cry. I said I will never cry. So she finally came back after 48 hours. And I didn't cry, but she said we'll have to help you. And they did.

You went to a hospital.

Oh, yes.

You went into labor and you went into a hospital.

Yes. Well, I didn't go into labor. I don't know what is before labor. But I was considered very ready. I had a wonderful doctor, but he didn't know anything about my being unable to bear a child. So I was working. I was picking up matches, which is a good exercise. But I couldn't do anything. So finally Christine was born.

What were the medical conditions like at that time?

Very good where I was, but it differed. I was in a very good hospital.

And then you brought the baby home.

Right.

Was your husband there?

My husband was there getting ready for the uprising. Of course, I didn't know it. 1943, and 1944, the 1st of August, they started.

Let's talk a little bit about the Warsaw ghetto for Jews. How much knowledge did you have of that?

We didn't have much knowledge, except that we had our whole heart, our efforts went to them when they had the uprising, because it wasn't possible-- Polish underground didn't have much arms. I mean they have for five people they had a revolver. Anyhow, we wanted to help. I mean the Polish people wanted to help, but they were unable to help. And they did five times an attack on ghetto's walls. But they didn't succeed. Many of them died in these attacks, because they wanted to help the uprising.

You're saying that the Polish resistance tried to help during the Warsaw ghetto uprising and trying to attack the outside walls.

Yes. Well, what happened was that there were-- it's incredible about the Allies. Jankowski, do you know about him? So when he-- how did he do-- oh, I see, yes, he pretended to be a Jew and he was behind the walls. So he knew how awful it was. And then when he escaped, he went to England and the resistance didn't believe him. So he said, you have to know that these people are dying. They need help. They said, the things you say, the tortures, the killings, tortures beyond understanding, that's not true. He said, I promise you its' true. So that was something that I can't understand still.

Did you know Jankowski at that time?

No, I didn't know him.

So you weren't aware that he had gone inside the ghetto?

No. No, I didn't know.

Was your husband involved with the group going to the ghetto during the ghetto uprising in the spring of '43?

I don't think so, no. No, he was not.

How far away was your apartment from the ghetto?

Quite a long way, on the other side of the city.

So you weren't aware of the burning and--

Oh, we were aware, of course. But we couldn't do anything. We were aware of everything.

Did you think that you may have had some friends inside the ghetto?

I was hoping not. I didn't know. I didn't know.

All right, now what month was your daughter born in 1943?

March.

So that was right before the uprising. So you were a new mother.

Yes.

Did you have to go back to work after you had the baby?

No, I didn't have to go back to work. And also, I went to Chyliczki again, because my sister had a little boy at the same time, and we went back where we started. So we were there and then--

You moved back to where your mother was staying to that village.

So we went there. And then I have to cut it shorter because it's not feasible to say what we were doing. Lots of people went to the same house, people who were afraid of staying in their apartments and houses. So there was a huge group. And we were helping these people, cooking for them, and so forth. So we were busy.

These were Polish people who left Warsaw to come out into the country to be safe, and they came to your house. Why did--

Not my house, the house that we rented.

Well, I'm meant the house that you were staying. Why did they come to you specifically?

Because this was the only house which could help them. The other ones were empty. And this was something that we could afford to help them.

So you provided a place for them to stay. And food?

Right.

How did you get the money for this?

Well, we still had some money after we both worked, my husband and I. And it was the country, so it was cheap.

Was your husband out in the village with you or did he stay in Warsaw?

No, no, he was with me. He came and said-- this was August 1944, before the 1st-- you have to stay here, because this is



not going to be for women. Women with children should take care of the children, because everybody would like to be either help with the-- what do you call people-- liaison and help otherwise in fighting. There were maybe some grenades being thrown. So you better stay here because grenades, my goodness. So he was trying to make it easy for us.

But she was crying all the time, my sister. And they knew that he will come back. And she said that, oh, we don't know. She was crying. Anyhow--

Where was her husband?

Her husband was also in the underground.

Working with your husband?

Well, I don't know if it was-- yes, yes, but it was different squadron, whatever it was called.

So your husband was talking about in preparation for the Warsaw city uprising in August of '44?

He wasn't talking about the preparation. He was saying that it is going to be 5 o'clock and he is going to have to fight.

After your baby was born in the spring of '43, then you went to the village.

Right--

And stayed there for over a year--

Right--

And sheltering other people.

Right.

And then in August, he came to you to tell you what was going to happen.

Right.

What thoughts did you have?

I was scared for him, very. He didn't tell me that he doesn't believe about the end of the uprising, so that he wouldn't tell me.

What did you know about the uprising? You were about 20 miles outside of town. What did while it was happening--

[BOTH TALKING] 18 kilometers is what? 15 miles.

While it was happening, what did you know what about what was going on?

We saw Warsaw burning. So we didn't have to have any details, because the Germans attacked with such force. They had such wonderful tanks and everything.

Did you see German tanks?

No, I didn't. We couldn't see it from such a distance. Well, before that, we could see some in the street.

So you did see German tanks?

Oh, yes.

What's it like to see a German tank?

Hmm?

What's it like to see a German tank in your street?

Terrible. Terrible.

What were your feelings about the Germans then?

Well, I don't know how to hate, but I certainly didn't think how I am going to forgive. I never forgot. I mean that's very difficult.

Did you ever try talking to any of the German soldiers?

I don't speak German. No.

Did any of them speak Polish?

Probably some, but not to me, because some of them were from Silesia, so they would probably know Polish.

How was your mother managing during this very difficult time?

Very well, very well. She was really quite brave. And she managed well.

And her health was OK?

Yes, mm-hmm. She has asthma, but not in such a terrible way which caught her later.

At the end of the uprising, Warsaw city uprising, what happened?

Well, people went to camps. And the only group of people who were taken prisoners was my husband's group. And they were for some reason sent to concentration camp. So whenever we say that my husband was in a concentration camp, they will say, well, he was Jewish. I said, no, he wasn't. So it was very, very difficult.

So the uprising, did he ever come back home first?

No, no, no, he never came back.

So he left to participate in the uprising. What particular part-- do you know what particular group of the AK that he was in?

Yes, I know. He was in the old town. And when it was impossible to stay there because everything was burnt and everything was taken by the Germans, then we went through the canals to the center of the city. That was terrible up to here in dirty water with rats flying-- not flying, swimming. It was awful. But he made it.

And he's in his what, mid to late 30s at this point?

When I was 20, he was-- tak, mid 20s, you're right. Tak, I say in Polish. Yes. I'm sorry.

So did his particular unit have a name, his particular--

Yes, Wigry. Wigry. Wigry is the name of the lake in Poland in the north. The larger group was Szare Szeregi, which is gray army, gray army. And then his particular regiment was Wigry.

And did he occupy a position of authority in that?

Yes, he was a lieutenant.

And did he later tell you that he was involved in actual fighting, physical fighting?

Yes, he did. He was. Mm-hmm.

Even though his vision wasn't 100%?

Didn't matter. Didn't matter.

So he was then taken away by the Germans.

Yes.

Captured and taken away. And where was he taken to?

To Bergen-Belsen. And then, for some reason, he was in Gross-Rosen, which is officers camp. But it wasn't a long time. Most of the time he was in Bergen-Belsen.

What did he say about his stay in Bergen-Belsen?

Well, what can he say? What can he say? He couldn't stand the food. So he didn't eat anything for 100 days, except that some rations gave him over-- because they were close, gave him some apples. Other than that, he didn't eat anything.

Sometimes I think, oh, I'm hungry. I didn't have my breakfast. 100 days. Actually, at some point, the Germans decided that the camp along with other camps should be moved towards Russia. So they marched. They didn't have any shoes left, but they marched 100 kilometers. That's a lot. But he survived.

When he was in Bergen-Belsen, he was with a group of other Polish resistance prisoners. Did he see any of the Jewish part of the camp?

No. No.

So he was not aware then of the other prisoners?

I don't know if he was not aware of other prisoners, but he didn't see other Jews.

Did he have to work at all in Bergen-Belsen?

No. No. He was so weak, they could take him to work.

Did he just wear his regular clothes or was he given a uniform?

He was given some drab clothes from the camp-- well, people who take care of the camp give them the clothes.

And then he was marched to Gross-Rosen.

Yes.

And for how long was he there?

Mm, I'm not sure. But that was probably some five months.

What did he do there?

Well, there, he was organizing the amateur theater. He was very good at writing songs. I still have a woman who writes to me, asks me, do we have any more songs? Because we sing, traveling around Europe we sing it with my family. So anyhow, he was a very good theater I understand.

They got their paper from the Italians. This was the leftover brown paper, because they buried their dead in big pieces of brown paper. There wasn't anything else available. But they had some leftover pieces, so they gave them something to write on, these brown paper. I still have some.

You're saying that the Italians bury the prisoners who died in this brown--

Brown coffins, brown paper coffins. Amazing.

Were you aware of where your husband was at this point? Did you know he was in Bergen-Belsen first?

Because through Red Cross he contacted me and I wrote to him.

And he was able to get your letters?

He was.

And was he able to write back to you?

He was not able to write back to me. And also, I could send him some food. But it was very often, you know. There were some people, his colleagues, who shared everything, and some who were just keeping it for themselves. But now it's very interesting how he reacted to some noise that was under his bed. He said to himself, I don't see anybody stealing. Who could this be? It was a gerbil. And he found his way and loved some of the stuff. I find this funny.

And when was your husband liberated?

He was liberated in 1945. Through some connections, he went to London. And from there, he was trying to get me to England.

OK, now, let's talk, you said that you had helped many of the Polish citizens coming out to your home in the country. But you also said you helped to shelter two Jewish women. When was that? And let's talk in detail about that. When did that begin?

Well, but this was earlier, because then both of these husbands, my brother-in-law and my husband worked with this workshop. So that was in Warsaw. So we have to go back to this. And then Eugenie Kassel was a colleague. She was a secretary in this factory. And my brother-in-law told us about her and her mother.

And then my mother said they could stay with me, because your apartment is so small. It's too dangerous for them. And she had a nice apartment on Aleja Niepodleglosciowa, Independence Street. And one small room was for Sylvia, for the mother. So it could be covered up with a big armoire. And that was like a little box. And she ended that, of course. That is why she went out for a walk.

And the other woman, she was pre-warned somehow. I don't know by whom. So she was the hide in the room. But it wasn't so small. It was just another armoire, you know. So she would stay there until the visitation was over. Then she

wasn't as depressed by it as her mother was.

What were the ages of these women?

Well, Eugenie, the daughter was about 40, no, 30, 40, no, 30. And the mother was respectively probably about 60.

And it was the daughter who worked in your husband's-- was a secretary in your husband's and your brother-in-law's place of work. How is it that your mother was so open to sheltering people that put her life in danger?

She wasn't open. Nobody knew about it.

No, I didn't mean that she was open to the world, but that she was willing to do that. She was putting her life in danger. She was risking her life.

Because we wanted to do and we couldn't. So she felt very much with us. And she was brave. So she knew she could be executed if they find her.

How do you explain that she had the bravery to do this? It was a very brave thing to do, exceptionally brave to put her life in danger.

She was very brave. 20,000 people were as brave in Warsaw, 20,000 people with Jews in Warsaw. So she was one of them.

So what do you attribute her willingness and your willingness?

I think that's we love people, and we love people, especially when they are persecuted. And we love to help.

Even if it means putting your life in danger?

Oh, yes, of course. Of course. Otherwise it's not very difficult to help people unless you take a risk. This was incredible how much they suffered. Oh, these people.

And I really don't know how my friends who found me now in America how she-- oh, because she was in the suburbs, yes. And she wasn't as vulnerable as people in Warsaw or close to Warsaw, the Jews.

So you were saying that 20,000 Polish people sheltered Jews in their apartments or offices.

Did you ever come across a book called Poles and Jews in the Second World War by Stefan Korbonski? Do you know who Stefan Korbonski is? Well, Stefan Korbonski is no longer alive. He died 10 years ago. They were very good friends of ours. And in the underground, he was representing the Polish government in exile. And he was very brave too. He organized all, along with General Kowalski, who was the head of the Polish uprising.

And then he wrote this book not that long before he died. And there are many, many interesting subjects, which he touched. And he was very well educated on all what happened between Polish and Jews. And he-- oh, how about Bartoszewski? He was also-- the Yad Vashem has of a Yad Vashem which I saw when I was in a Jerusalem. And so that's Stefan Korbonski.

Bartoszewski is married to a Jewish lady. And he was the last ambassador to Austria. He is now in Warsaw. And he is a professor. He teaches and writes books. And I wonder, will you be interested in this Poles and Jews in the Second World War?

Well, we'll look at in a moment.

OK.

Let's talk again a little bit in detail how your mother handled having these two women, what measures she took, and so forth, and what a typical day was like.

Well, that I wouldn't know, because, you know, it's so far away from me now that I don't know-- I couldn't imagine the plan of their day because it was so a depending upon movement of those Germans who would have come and would require hiding of the two women.

So when did the women go into hiding at your mother's house?

Which will be the year then? That would be before the ghetto uprising.

It was before the ghetto uprising.

So it would be what? 1940 probably, I would say.

The ghetto uprising was in spring of '43. So it was quite a bit before that?

Yes, it was quite it was before that.

And the two women came together.

Mm-hmm.

And then how long did they stay together before--

Well, Eugenie stayed five months. And I don't know where she went. But her mother, as I say, a few days because she wanted to get out and get some fresh her. It was very dangerous, because people who owned the apartment house were Volksdeutsche. But they didn't think anything of it. Eugenie wasn't very Jewish looking. And besides, I suppose that they thought that they will get some money out of it or something like that, that they could bribe the Germans. So they waited.

Did you know these women?

Yes.

The Kassels?

I didn't know her mother. But I knew Eugenie.

Did you know her before she moved into your mother's house?

No, I didn't.

So that's when you met her.

Right.

And what kind of relationship did you have with her? How often were you able to see her?

Oh, I would see her every five days, every week, something like that. I liked her very much.

Was she married?

No, she was not.

So you spent time with her.

Yes.

And what did you talk about?

Oh, I have no idea. I'm sure she loved music, because I did. And she would love books as I did. So we had a lots of things to talk about.

What was it like for her once her mother did not return?

Oh, I didn't even go there then. I couldn't. Tragedy, complete tragedy. For some time, she thought she would be back, because there's always this chance, a very slim chance. But there is. After that she just had to give up. Poor girl.

So during the day, unless someone came and knocked on the door, she was free to walk around your mother's apartment?

Yes, she was.

And where did your mother get enough food to feed additional people?

I don't know. I really don't know. She manages. She managed.

Were you ever really concerned for your mother's safety?

I wasn't sure that it means that she will be killed. I thought that she would go to prison maybe. I didn't know that she would be killed. I had no idea.

But even knowing your mother would go to prison is difficult.

Of course. Of course, it will be.

Were you aware at that time of other people who were sheltering other Jews?

At that time, no, I didn't know.

So this is obviously something you never talked about with anybody else.

No, I didn't.

And then what happened after those five months? You said she stayed with your mother for five months.

I don't know where she went. I have no idea because we lost contact completely.

She left on her own, or was she told to leave? Do you know?

Well, she told my mother where she's going. But I don't know. My mother is no longer alive.

Do you know why she felt she had to leave your mother?

That I don't know. I never asked my mother. You know, very soon after this, I left Poland and escaped from Poland with Christine, my daughter, on a Swedish cargo boat and went to London. I left in 1947.

Yeah, but you're saying that your mother sheltered these women in the early 1940s.

Yes.

Pre-ghetto uprising--

Right.

So it was in '42.

Mm-hmm.

You don't recall exactly.

No.

OK. All right, it's the end of the war. And what was it like for the end of the war for you and your family?

It was magnificent. We couldn't believe it.

Did you really feel liberated in a sense?

I felt liberated when I stepped on the Swedish soil. Before that, I wasn't, because I escaped from Poland. I couldn't get any passport. So I had to go illegally. And my husband was in London, and he waited for us in London.

Well, OK, let's talk about 1945, the end of the war. Your husband is--

In London.

Had been liberated from Gross-Rosen and then went to London.

He came from Gross-Rosen and he was liberated by the Allies, well, yes, from Gross-Rosen. And then he went to London.

Did he come back to you first?

Oh, no, he couldn't. He wouldn't be able to leave. He didn't want to stay in Poland, oh, no.

Why did he not want to stay in Poland?

Because he didn't want to stay with the communist government ever. It was a funny incident when his friend, an MP, member of parliament, who was delighted to see my husband right after the war. And he said, well, it's so lovely to see you. I'm just going to Winston Churchill. Do you want to come with me to meet him? So he said, sure, I would like to.

So the friend said, this is my friend, a Polish friend of mine, who is now going to stay here and tries to get his wife here. And Churchill said, you mean he is not going to Poland? And the friend said, no. He said, come, come, you Polish people, I hate -- like hell, but I wouldn't emigrate. Typical.

Well, he would not emigrate because he didn't have a reason. And it couldn't be previewed how it's going to end, how long would the communist government going to stay.