

April 12, 1983, and I'm at the US Holocaust Commission. If you would just give us your name and, if you'd like to tell us either about yourself before or during your internment or after internment, whatever you would like to talk about and do want to have it on the tape. We need one for history so that people will not forget what you people went through. If you want to talk just about before the war, that's fine.

You can talk about what happened. And if you want to talk from beginning to end, that's fine. We have an hour, which is not a lot. If you want to continue, there is a way of doing that. So if you can tell us what your name is, into the microphone, and where you are from, and just go from there.

OK.

Not too close though. OK. You want me to hold it? OK.

My name is Mary Kress. I'm born in Poland-- my maiden name was Leszczyk-- in the town of Czestochowa. My father was a tanner. And I was the only child.

Go ahead. No, I'm just--

You don't want me to--

No, no. I want to go through it a little bit.

I was 13 when the war broke out in 1939. And soon we found ourselves in the ghettos and separated from our families. I was very fortunate to be able to survive together with my mother. However, I lost her about 10 years ago here in the States.

And I was in the ghetto. And from the ghetto we had went into a hiding place that was prepared to us by a Polish family that used to work for my father in the tannery.

Were they Jewish, non-Jewish?

No. They were non-Jews. They were Polacks. They made a hiding place for us. And we were about 11 people all together there. There was 10 grownups, one child of four years, a little girl. There was my mother, myself, my uncle, my aunt, and some friends.

OK. Now I just want to try something, just to-- OK. You stopped with your mother, friends, there was a four-year-old.

We was hiding. Yeah, I finished that. And

How-- what did you do during the days? Did you have to stay in?

Yes. We were there, all together, for 18 months. The hiding place was done mostly underground. And we had a ladder that would let us out to the attic that we could only, for once in a while go up, and it was daylight. Otherwise, it was all dark. And we could only look in the attic out through little holes to see the world outside and see the changing of the seasons.

Well, after 18 months-- the law at that time we left there was the early-- wait a minute. I think it was about '42 when we left. And the law, was I think, that any Polack who would hide out a Jew would have been killed together with them.

When you say you left, did you leave of your own accord, or did the people make you leave that you were staying with?

No. We didn't leave. We left the ghetto--

OK.

To the hiding place.

Right. And from the hiding place--

After 18 months, the law changed. The Germans said, give us the Jews and we will not hurt you. And that's when the Polacks called the Gestapo. They had everything they wanted from us, all the valuables, all the jewelry, everything they wanted. The Gestapo came and went straight to the hiding place without any thinking of it. They knew exactly where we were.

They took us all out. They counted us to make sure that we were the right amount. And from then on they took us from one prison to the other. For about a month dragged us through Poland and Germany, to prisons, and then we arrived in Auschwitz.

We arrived a small group in Auschwitz. And because we did come from a jail, they branded us as political prisoners. Well, in Auschwitz we became quarantined. And we were on a block that I was not-- actually, we were not allowed to go out no place except for counting, morning and night.

You had to stay inside?

Most of the time because it was a quarantine. We couldn't mix with the others for a while only.

I'm just trying to clarify something.

Yeah.

How did you spend your time in quarantine?

Just laying around on the pritsche on the bunks. And that didn't last very long. But unfortunately, it didn't take very long for me to get sick with typhoid fever and rheumatic fever on top of it.

Well, there was a hospital. But we knew that once you get into that hospital you never get out of it. And my mother was the one that would not let me go. So I was pretty bad. At that time, I was already-- we were already transferred and out from the quarantine block to C Lager. And we worked in a factory that made those-- I don't know what it was.

We were braiding lines, long ropes. People said it was for boats or whatever it is. I don't know. The problem was that we had to make, like, 25 meters a day. And they didn't give us what to make it with. And it was very difficult, to the point that we even took whatever we could spare of our own clothing. We would tear it up into pieces, shreds, and use it. But I was very sick, and I couldn't do my quota.

Well, I was lucky. I guess-- I don't know-- God must have been over us because the men that would collect them in the evening was a rabbi's son from Czechoslovakia. And he saw how sick I was. And nobody squealed on me, which was amazing. But he, every night before he delivered it to the warehouse, he would steal one of those bowls and bring it to my mother and says, here is one for Mania, which was my name in Poland. And yours, I hope you can make.

And that made a lot easier for my mother. And we met our quota. But one day, I guess maybe they accumulated a day or two, the other girls couldn't meet their quota. That was already in December of 1945. The beginning of December, I guess, because they ordered us out. It was very cold and snowy that night. And they took our clothes.

We undressed completely. And we had to kneel in the snow as a punishment for not meeting our quota, the whole block, everybody that worked in that. Well, we stayed there for hours. And it was a severely cold night. And a lot of girls and women died right around us.

I remember my mother saying, how are you? Well, I said, fine. Well, after we were through about two or three hours, they took us into a shower, a cold shower that was just all-- just-- just open, nothing to-- [AUDIO OUT]

OK. It's working. Let's try a little bit. And I'm going to stop it. Do you want to hold this or-- do you prefer to hold it? Do you want me to hold it?

No. I'll hold it.

OK.

But where should I start?

OK. You had gone into the showers, and all you said to [INAUDIBLE]. And they all repeat it to [INAUDIBLE], the showers brought your temperature down. I'm very sorry.

Well--

Yeah. Don't get too close.

Well, when we went into that shower, I was really sick. My temperature was high. But I guess that is just what I needed because that cold shower that they gave us-- on the outside, and the wind blow from all sides-- must have pushed my temperature down. And it acted like a cold sponge for me. And as it was over and I walked out of it, I walked out on my own strength.

It was a miracle. My mother looked at me, and my aunt was there too. And she says, how are you? And I said, oh, Mom, I feel so much better. And they looked at each other in disbelief.

I waited about another hour until they gave us our clothes, which was damp because they had cleaned it, they called it. And we got dressed and marched back into the block. As I walked into our block and to our room, the girls looked at me. All of them could not believe that I came back from that ordeal.

They looked and they said-- I heard them say, literally, she is still alive. And I waved to them, and I smiled. I laid down. And every day from then on, I felt better and stronger. My temperature never came back. The only thing, the rheumatic fever left me with a murmur, a heart murmur. But it doesn't bother me really.

But after that, I had a few weeks to, what they call, I recuperated. And as the front was coming closer, they rounded us up, and we left. The last transport that left from Auschwitz was on January 18, 1945. And I was among them, my mother and I and my aunt. But we were somehow separated from my aunt. And she wound up in half of the-- other half, in the other half. And mother and I were in the front.

So we were a group of at least 5,000. And we were left just a few thousand. We walked aimlessly. We walked into Poland. We walked back to Germany. We walked in circles. There was no place. They didn't know where to take us.

From the group that were at least 5,000, we were left a few hundred. And finally the Germans decided that they would put us on wagons. So they brought some coal, open coal wagons to put us on it. But by then I really couldn't walk anymore.

And my legs were so stiff that I couldn't pick both my legs up to pick myself up and go into the wagons. And my mother was so sick and so weak she couldn't pick me up. And nobody could help me. So I just gave up, and I sat down at the end of the road on a stone.

And Mom said to me-- and I begged my mother, please go. There is no point of both of us sitting here. And she says, no. If you don't go, I don't go.

So we both sat there for a while until out of the blue sky my aunt walked through. And she saw us sitting there. And she was working that day to deliver the bread to the wagons. They finally decided to give some nourishment to the people. And she was a real hard worker. And the German that was watching them said, you are a good worker. I'm going to reward you at the end of the day. I'll give you a loaf of bread. And that was a-- that was a fortune.

So when she saw us, she ran to this man. She found this German soldier and asked him to do her a favor since she worked so hard. And he says, yes, you did work very good. She says, do me a favor. He says, what do you want? And she said--

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

The German soldier or whatever.

No. You got a-- she went to the German soldier, with the bread.

Well, and she says to him, I found my sister and her daughter here. And they're not on the wagons. They're just sitting outside on the road. Please, do it for me. Take-- open those wagons and let-- put them on. Let them-- let them on them. And he hesitated for a while, but he said, OK.

So he did. He opened them. And with his own help and her, we both came onto the wagons. Well, we were on it, and we were-- they started driving. They took us to a few camps. And most of the camps were filled, and they would not let us off. So they took us to Berlin.

We stayed on the railroad station while they were bombing us all night. And the next morning we-- they bombed all around us, not us. Next morning, the train pulled out again and took us to Ravensbrück, which finally they had room for us. They took us into Ravensbrück and put us in quarantine.

We were there for, I think, about three weeks. And after the three weeks, we were taken to-- to Malchow. In Malchow we were another month or so, until I would-- more than a month because it was-- must have been the very beginning or the very end, the very end of April or the beginning of May that we, again, started. We were rounded up and walked.

We walked out of Auschwitz in group-- no pardon me-- Malchow, in groups. And we walked aimlessly. We knew, we had a feeling the war was coming to an end. But there was nothing we could do and no place that we could go. We were deep in Germany.

Well, from a few thousand again, the group narrowed to very, very small, very little of us. And as we walked, one day I said to my mother, Mom, I really don't think I can go on like that. There's no point. Let's be daring. Let's hide and not go along with them. And she said, fine.

So when they made a resting period. And they suddenly-- after the resting period, they said to us, let's go again. Mom and I never got out. We hid under the--

[BACKGROUND NOISE]

Well, well, when they called us up to go, start going again, Mother and I never got up, and we stayed behind. And after a little-- a few minutes later, we did get up and noticed that a few more of our women gave up. And we probably, maybe, counted about a dozen of us that were together and said, well, what do we do now?

So we said-- well we decided, we'll probably go towards town because we were just out in the nowhere. And then suddenly, that big storm came. And it started to pour. It poured so severely we were all soaked. And I don't know what happened. I just started to cry like a little kid. And Mom says to me-- she looks at me in disbelief. She says, why are you crying now?

She says, all these years you were so fine. You haven't cried. And then suddenly, look, she says, we're free. And I said,

well, that's true, Mom. We're free. But who am I? Who do I belong to? Where can we go? I said, it's raining, and we're wet. We haven't got a place to go to.

She says, well, don't worry. We'll help. We'll do something. So we started walking towards town. And as it turned out, all the Germans have left the town because the front was coming nearer. And they had learned that the Russians are coming in. And they would not stay with the Russians.

So we-- they fed us, and they let us sleep in the barn. And that was heaven. We slept through the night. And the next morning, when we woke up, to our big surprise the barn was full with German soldiers.

First of all, the fear we had was so unbelievable when we looked at them. But they really didn't know whether we were Jewish or English or Polish or anything. Well, I whispered to my mother very quietly not to talk, and I will go outside with another girl and see what happens. So we did.

As we walked down the street, we saw a lot of German soldiers and tanks and everything pulling back from the front and coming. They were-- most of them were wounded. And all of a sudden, we heard Jeeps coming up. And three of them came.

And they were the Allies, but I really, to this very day, don't know what they were, whether they were English, French, or American. I have no idea. They were not the Russians. When the Germans saw that, they suddenly they were prepared for it because they pulled those white flags out. And-- and they were welcoming the Allied troops.

They were throwing chocolate to the kids around there and everything. My friend, the one that was with me, was tempted to pick up a piece of chocolate. And I said, oh, don't you dare, I said. Let's just sit and listen. And a few minutes they just passed and left.

And I ran back to my mother and I said to my mother, Mom, the war is over. And she looks at me and she says, well, I just don't believe it. I said, Mom, I'm telling you. The war is over. Go outside and see. So we did. And it was like a new world.

Everybody was friendly. Everybody was happy. And the Germans killed a cow, and they gave everybody meat. They made fires outside, and they cooked it. And it was unbelievable. But that didn't last very long, barely a few hours. When they learned that the-- the Germans somehow learned that the Allies are not coming in, but the Russians are coming in instead, so they pulled back and they picked up every piece of ammunition or whatever they had and they started shooting against the-- against the Russians again. And we were caught in between, like.

Well, it didn't take too long because the Russians were advancing rapidly. And the Germans left that little village, and the Russians came in. And that was on May the 7th of 1945. I think it was the last piece of Germany, the last day of the war. But we didn't know. I know it was that date.

And the first that came in were two soldiers on horses and followed by three Jeeps, two with captains and officers and one with a Red Cross, with a doctor. Well, they all got out. They were very stiff. But most of the girls that were there were from Ukraine and from Russia. They were working on the farms.

So they walked over to talk to them. And I said to my mother-- we were standing very close to them. And I said to her, Mom, don't say anything-- in Yiddish. And as I say that, one of them turns around. He looks at me, and he says, Yiddishekinder?

I couldn't believe it. He was tall and blond and blue eyes, the bluest eyes you've ever seen. And here he talks to me Jewish, Yiddish. And I look, and I said, yeah. And he says, nothing is going to happen to you. We know everything. We'll take care of you. And don't worry, he says, most of this battalion, most of these people that are with me are Jewish.

And then he brought over the captain and his wife. His wife was with him on the front. And he told him that we were

Jewish. And then he called over the doctor. And he was such a young man. He must have been in his middle 20s or 27 at the most. He was a doctor in the army, and he was Jewish.

And it was-- they took such good care of us, it's almost unbelievable. They gave us a special home. And they put two soldiers in front of-- downstairs. And they had every name of each girl of us to check in the evening that we're all in and nobody could hurt us. And they took care of us.

We were there about a month or two. And then when we were really feeling a little better. And the Russians were pulling out whatever they can from the little villages, I imagine, back to Russia. But there was no way we could return to Poland because Germany was bombed, and it was ruins. All around us, miles and miles, hundreds and miles, nothing but ruins.

The only way to go out was by horse and buggy. Well, they took us in a covered wagon and hid us underneath because they were not allowed to. We were civilians, and they were still an army and occupying Germany. So they put us, and they smuggled us, really, through the border into Poland.

They went-- they were going through Poland to Germany. And when we got to Poland, they let us out. We made our way back to our hometown because we had arranged previously with my father, if we survive, we'll meet in Poland. We had no idea what lay ahead of us. So we did.

When I came to Poland, my father was not there. And I had words that he did not make it. You know, people do say, but, you know, you'd always hoped. But we were there about two months. And Poland was very, very antisemitic.

They actually killed a few people, a couple, a young couple who survived all the horrors of camp and war. When they came back to Poland, they were killed by the Polacks. So we left Poland again. In fact, we were hoping that we might be able to pick some stuff-- because we had nothing-- that my parents had buried there. But there was no way I could get to it to get it. So I never did get back to the place.

Was your home-- your home was still there?

It was there, but--

The house, the house.

The house was there. I was-- I had enough courage-- Mom wouldn't go. I did. I went to my home, and I walked in. And the same janitor was there, a woman. She recognized me. And she says, you're alive? And I said, yes. But I wanted to go into the place we lived.

So I knocked on the door. And a woman answered. She opened the door, and she looked at me. And I said, would you mind if I look around, just see the place? And she says, no. We've heard that some wealthy Jews lived here.

No. I looked first. And we had a big, tall heating stove in one of the-- in the dining room. And it was all patched up. It looked like it was broken. And I said, what happened? It was not the same tile, the tile that-- it was all tiles. And she said, well, we heard some wealthy Jews were here. And most of the Jews hid their money in the stoves among the tiles.

So they took it practically apart to look for money. He says-- I didn't say a word. She says, did you know the people that lived here. I said, yes, I did know them. I wouldn't say that was us. And I just looked away and went through, and then I left. And I went back.

But there were-- my parents his something in the cemeteries too, at my grandfather's grave. But I was afraid to go because the Polacks were all over. It was unbelievable. So I said, hell with it. I don't need it. So we left Germany-- I mean Poland to Germany. We smuggled.

We went through Czechoslovakia and then to Germany. But my mother and I were separated on the border. Mom could

not make it because we had falsified papers to go through the border. So they wouldn't let me through. My mother didn't know that they didn't let me through. I went ahead.

So when I went with a cousin of mine and her brother, and the three of us, we couldn't make it. When we passed it, I said, you know what? This is such an easy way to go through that border. Why don't we just cross it. It was a little river and nothing, just a little bit of water and pebbles. We could have walked through. And they both agreed it was easy.

But I didn't have a chance to tell them in the back, which was about a half a mile down, that-- where my mother was with my cousin, the husband of this cousin. So we said-- we passed and they didn't. And they went back to Poland, to Czestochowa, where I went right into Czechoslovakia.

And this is almost unbelievable. It is like a dream because I walked through that water, and I got wet. I wet myself and my shoes. I was all in water. Didn't bother me much. But we see-- I said, well, I have to dry up. And I see a man coming.

We were so naive and so young and so inexperienced, even so we went through so much. We went into a country we did not speak the language, Czechoslovakia. I didn't speak one word. So I take a look. I said to my cousin after I passed, I said, my God, where are we going? We're already past the border. We're safe. But we don't know where to go to the train.

And I take a look, and one man is walking down the street, a young man. And he comes closer. And he grabs his head, and he says, my God. And it was my best girlfriend's brother from Poland. And my cousin that I walked, she lived in the same building. They were neighbors. So he knew all of us.

He says, what are you doing here? We said, we just crossed the border. He says, boy, are you lucky. One little stop, they would catch you and send you right back. He says, you come with me.

He took us to his girlfriend. And we washed and cleaned, ate. We had some money. We gave him-- he bought us tickets to Prague, Praga, the capital. And he says-- and newspapers-- and he says, don't speak on the train. Here, read the paper and show your ticket. And that's all you do. When the conductor comes to you, he'll say [CZECH] please. [CZECH] He says, just give him your ticket.

And we did. We made it to Praga. But there was no problem anymore because there were so many displaced people that they couldn't take all of us and send us back. So another boo-boo-- we checked into a hotel and slept over and did not even pay attention to the name of the place or where it was. We were so still not clear.

So in the morning, we had to get to Germany.

[AUDIO OUT]

We went to meet some other people the next morning and arrange our crossing of the border to Germany, which we did. And we realized that we could not find our way back to the hotel.

Stop [AUDIO OUT]. OK.

Well, we didn't have much of any personal things, maybe a few light things. You couldn't smuggle or anything going through borders with a lot of luggage, so we didn't really have much. But whatever we had we left in that hotel. So we didn't bother finding out. We couldn't. We didn't really know. We paid but never went back.

So I only had my purse and some money in it. And all I saved was one towel. I'm not-- can't forget, a terry towel, a red and white terry towel. And we arranged. And that night, we went through-- we smuggled ourselves through the border and arrived in Germany and went on to a city named Bamberg.

When I came there, I found a lot of my friends from home. And they would not let us go on. And by the way, when we

left-- said goodbye to my mother, when I went ahead, I said, Mom, in case if we get separated-- which we were used to that already by then-- we will meet in a place called Feldafing because that's the only place I knew when I was in Poland. We never heard of anything else. So Mom said, fine.

So I said to my friends, no, I'm going on to Feldafing. She says, not until you get a place here, you settle, wait a day or two, and then go on to Feldafing, which we did. Well, I arrived and Feldafing maybe 10 days later, you know, a week later. And I met people. And I heard that Mom was back in Poland, that she did not make it.

Well, then there was no point of me staying there. So I wanted to get out from this. It was a displaced people's camp. Well, as it turned out, typhoid fever broke out there or something, some kind of a sickness. And they closed that camp, quarantined it.

Any idea, any word about closing you in or quarantining you in was unbelievable. It was so scary, it was just unbelievable. I said, no matter what it takes, I must get out of here. So the only way to get out of there was in those big pickup trucks.

Well, I pushed myself on. They pushed me off. I went right again, and I was thrown off again. You know, people were pushing. That's all you had in camp is nothing but pushing. They're still pushy.

So on the train, we had met a couple of young boys that survived too. And they knew us. And they saw us, that we couldn't get on that bus-- on that pickup truck. They said, well, we'll see that nobody pushes you off anymore. And they put us on. And we stayed on it.

Well, we got on it. That truck was loaded. We were just like sardines. All of us were standing. And we started to go. And we went up, up on the hill somehow. It must have been at least two stories down. And we were on the side. And down there was a railroad station-- railroad tracks where the rail, the train, would pass.

Well, in came a Jeep, an American MP Jeep. And our driver wanted to make room for the other one, and he just turned a little bit too much, and we rolled over and fell down two stories with that whole truck onto an oncoming train. Well, the train stopped, I understand, just a few feet from our truck. But it was a tragedy.

We had 11 people killed on this truck, four sisters all four of them coming home from a wedding; 35 very, very severely injured. And the others, we were all injured, but we survived. However, I lost conscience when it was turning. And I wound up on the bottom of this truck. So the ones that were alive were stepping all over me to get out.

My cousin got out. I didn't. The boys saw her and they said, where is your cousin? And she says, she's on the bottom there. So they went looking. And they noticed-- I was wearing a kerchief. They recognized it and pulled me out.

Well, within seconds there was Red Cross and MP, Americans. That was already in Munich, in the American zone-- near Munich. It was Feldafing. And they brought me to. And they were going to take me to the hospital because they didn't know what-- I was swelling up.

My cousin stays over me. And she is crying. She says, you're not going to go to the hospital. I'm alone here. She says, please, let's go away from here. I was such an idiot, I said, OK. So I lost my little purse I had. So I had no money. The only thing I was holding was that towel, clutched in my fist so strong nobody could get it out of me. And I still had that towel.

So I woke up, and I looked around. And I saw a young man laying next to me. And I knew he was dead. He was so bad. You could see bones, breaking, sticking out. And his head was resting on a stone. It was unbelievable, waiting to pick him up to the hospital. So I took that towel, and I folded it so neatly. And I picked his head very carefully up, and I put that towel under his head. And I said goodbye and good luck.

And we walked out, away from this accident. But see, we didn't know that we can't walk too far because they've surrounded the whole area. So when I came to the corner, there was an MP. And he says, where are you going? I said, to



Munich. He says, were you in that accident?

I said, why are you asking me that? He says, because you don't look good. And by the way, I had spoken English then because during the war I had private tutoring in home before I came to the camp. So I was learning English. And I spoke well English then, so well.

He says, I'll get you there. So he stopped a German car. And he says, you bring those two girls to Munich. Where do you want to go? All we knew was the German museum because that's where the people met. So we went there.

By the time I arrived there, I was like this, swelling. And I didn't see a mirror. I had no feeling. But I walked into there. And there were people from my hometown. And they looked at me. They said, what happened? They knew that there was that accident.

So anyway, I stayed over there. And we met some friends, who took us to their home. And I got so severely ill there that it took a week for me to come back to myself. In the meantime, some of them went back to Poland and told my mother that there was 80 people in a truck, I was the only one that survived. It was unbelievable.

But anyway, I made it back. And it took two more months for my mother to come from Poland and join me. And I still had marks, bruises from that accident. I survived, and I came to Germany. And I went to nursing school. I became a nurse and worked there till 1949, until I emigrated to the United States, where I got married.

Did you meet your husband--

I met my husband in Germany. But we did not-- we were going out for a number of years, but we didn't get married until I came to the States. We both came to the States and married in New York and had a son and a daughter.

You mentioned before, when we talked before about your father, and you met him.

Yes. Well, going back to my father-- he arranged-- we had a tannery in Poland. And one of his workers that worked for him made a hiding place. He arranged it with him, of course, for money. He arranged it for him that he would make a hiding place and hide us out. And we were about 10 grownups and one child. That little girl was four years old.

And just about four days or so before we were to go to this hiding place, my father was picked up and sent to another camp. And he sent us a note, a message through somebody, that by all means to go on with our plans, and he will try to join us. So we did go. But my father could not join us. And all of a sudden, we had received a letter to the hiding place from my father, saying that he is, again, among friends, like in 1942, which we understood that he ran away from a camp, and he is in a ghetto. He was in Radom, in Poland. And he is going to join us.

Well, he didn't make it. He was caught again and sent to Auschwitz. But it took two-- we were hiding there for a year and a half. And after all the money was gone and the Germans had changed the law that they will not hurt the Polacks, they called the SS on us and gave us to the SS. And we were arrested, and we were brought to various prisons until we came to Auschwitz.

And I was in Auschwitz about three weeks, until my cousin walks down. I had a cousin there too, who walked down the street and saw a young man walking in. And there were very few men in the-- there were none. He only came into work during the day or deliver, like, coal, or wood, or anything. Well, she walked over to him. And she says, where are you from? And he said, from Czestochowa.

And she says, is there anybody else? He says, yes, Mr. Leszczyk is here. She looks at him, and she says, this is impossible. He's probably not alive anymore. He says, well, I know him very well. In fact, he is not here under his real name even. He was caught on the Pole-- on the Aryan side, and he was arrested. And they brought him here a long time ago.

And she says, well, you can go and tell him that his wife and his daughter are here too. And that was a shock because

my father was, even in Auschwitz, planning to escape. It was not easy, and it was not heard of. But too, I just bought a book-- my husband read it. I didn't read it yet-- saying that those two men, one of them that wrote that book, they did escape. Those were the only two that escaped from Auschwitz. And they were in the Kanada. That was the place they worked for.

My father worked there too. And I put, now, two and two together, that he must have been with one of them because he did plan-- he told us he was planning to run away with another small-- a very small group people that worked with him. So putting all this together, I think he must have been in the same group. But once he found out, he never did.

But going back to that, a little bit earlier than that, about two weeks before-- I rarely dream-- I had a dream that I saw my father. And I was wearing a red dress. And I said to my mother in the morning-- I was so hesitant to tell her about it because it was so painful, but I had to tell her. I said, Mom, I was dreaming that I saw Daddy.

And she didn't say a word. And then, when this man came in and told us, so the next day he brought me a note from my father. It was his signature, but it was not his handwriting. And I asked, why didn't he write a whole note? He says, because he has a hand in a cast. And I said, why?

He says, because when they liquidated or whatever they did with the children's camp, one of the little boys ran away. And he ran into practically, just happened to run into my father. And he says, please, save me. So my father took him and hid him on his block, on his-- they called it a koja, the place you slept. It was just a board.

And he had a lot of problems from the other men, who were afraid to keep this child. And he must have gotten into a fistfight, and he broke his hand or whatever. But the boy survived, I must say. I've seen him after the war. However, I don't remember his name. I don't know where he is or anything. He did look me up.

And I saw my father. And when I heard that he was there-- I was quarantined when I came to Auschwitz. They took everything away from me. And they gave me a long, chiffon, black dress and Holland wooden shoes. And I couldn't walk in that. I was holding it. And I was tripping over the dress. So I tied it with a rope.

And one of the girls says, well, why don't you wear my dress today? You're going to see your father today. She was there longer. And it was a red dress she loaned me. And I wore that dress. And I went out barefoot. And I went out to that gate.

And the woman that was in charge of my block was a rabbi's daughter from Czechoslovakia, Praga. And she says, I'm going with you. If this is true, she says, this has never happened in Auschwitz. And she comes with me. And there is my mother and myself. And she's standing right next to me. And one transport comes in, and he isn't there. And he is a tall-- was a tall man.

And he was wearing those striped uniforms. Well, why didn't? I was still quarantined. And a second, and a third, and a fourth, and I don't see him. And I looked at my mother. I said, I don't believe that is true. And then the last transport that walks in, I see that tall man, and I look at his face. And I scream, Daddy!

I guess you heard it all over town. So she could have my hand. And she says, shh. Don't. But you know, she said-- came to me and she says, you take him to our block. And when-- and I will stay outside and watch. Nobody's going to hurt you.

So I have to go back a little bit. While I was quarantined, the women would come in with a lot of food and clothing, and I was starving. And I was down. I was just down, too weak to fight it anymore. And they said, why don't you go out? There's one man, and he gives everybody everything. He worked there. And he threw over whatever he could. He was working by-- when the people came, they emptied the wagons.

They took this crew in to take the things that were left in the wagons, to empty so the wagons would leave. So what did he care? Whatever he could get-- food, clothing-- he threw over to the women. When he walked into our block, the women said-- they looked and they said, my God, that's the man that gave us all the food and clothing.

He was, all that month almost, right across from me, and I had no idea. If I had gone out there, I would have passed out, I'm sure. Here I was prepared for it. Well, he came back a few times. And once, to my big amazement, I was sitting with him in the street there under a block talking. And my mother and an SS woman-- and she was such a bad person. She walked with one of those German shepherds. She was known. But she saw me talking with a man, so she came over. And she says, don't you know that this is forbidden?

You know, you're not allowed. And she says, do you know him? I said, yes. He says, who is he? I said, that's my father. I told her. And she looked. And that, I said, that's my mother. I took a chance. And she says, you found your father here, and you're with your mother? I said, yes. She says, then go on talking. That was unbelievable.

But that was the last time I saw him because he was also sent away a few times later, on to Buchenwald. And I understand through people, through sources, that he was alive until about April 13 and died, just was killed or whatever, on the road, going, going, wanting to survive, but didn't.

Well, that was one of the stories. If you want, there's another very interesting that I will go back to the time when I was taken out of camp and brought into prison.

When I went when I came into prison, we were there. We were all together, all the women from the camp. There was a-- not the camp, from that hiding place. We had about, oh, about six of us I think. And this little girl was with us. She was so bright, it was unbelievable. And the mother of that child was a-- well, we were there for three weeks, I think, in that prison.

And they put us in one of these-- in the cells with-- this is unbelievable-- with some Russian women. They were caught from the underground, but they were really Russians. They were wearing Russian uniforms. And they were with the Russian Army but caught from the partisans, I guess. And those women were caught, two of them. And they were with us.

So we were sleeping together.

[AUDIO OUT]

We'll see.

There was two women. And they were Russian women. And they were soldiers from the front. But they were descended somehow into the underground. And they were caught. And they were caught previously. That was their second time they were caught. And they told us of their terrible punishment and everything. And they would hope that the underground would come and liberate them from this, somehow take them out of this camp.

And she says, Mary, it will happen. And if it happens, you come with us, all of you, which we wanted. And they did. There was a try to liberate those women. But we were on the third floor, I think, or the second. I don't even know how many floors that prison held.

But they were-- came as far as to the door. They would open, and then somehow the Gestapo came, and they ran away. They were not caught. And we were not liberated.

We were there for a while until they picked us and took us away. And this little girl never did come along. We heard later they took her down to the yard and just killed that kid, that child, and separated that mother from the little girl. That was really the story about it.

Going back to the Polacks, that's the one thing-- and while they were hiding us, about a year or eight months after they took us in, somebody was suspecting that they were holding out Jewish people. And they must have called the Gestapo. But at that time, they would not give us up because if they would, they would have been killed together with us.

So again, twice I said I dreamed. I had a dream I fell asleep and that I saw a hand reach through the wall, wanting to reach me. And I was pushing back. It was a man's hand with-- I remember this clearly-- with a wedding band on it. And he didn't touch me. I knew he was there, and he didn't. And I wake up all in sweat. And I said, oh, Mama, I had a terrible dream. And Mother's brother was there, my uncle. And he says, well don't talk about it. We don't want to hear anything bad.

And Mother says, do you really want to tell us? And I said, yes. She says, well let her. Tell me what happened because it's going to bother you. I said, Mom. I told her I saw a hand that was trying to reach out and grab me and never did. And she said, well, that's not so bad. They didn't grab you.

As I finished that we hear the dogs. The Polack that kept us had a dog. And the Germans invaded that house, whatever you say. And they came with German shepherds. But our-- with those smelling dogs. But our dog was barking to the other dogs, and they must have spoiled their incentive or whatever it was. And they barked at each other, could not find us. And they went up.

We didn't expect anything. So the opening to our hiding place was from underneath the roof, an attic. But they went up to the attic. And next to it was standing a box. That box was there for us to cover this opening. But that night, we just didn't put it on.

So what the Germans-- we heard the minute the dogs, they said, where are the Jews? Where are those damn Jews? And they took that box, and they put it right on our opening. And they stamped-- stepped a foot where the box was. And there was no opening.

They covered us, actually. And they looked around and looked around and went through his house with a fine-tooth brush. Come they couldn't, and they left. And we were saved.

And a year later or so, he himself-- the law changed, and he called them for us. So I guess that's what it is.

Do you have any memories of your earlier childhood, how your family was?

Yes. We had a very large family. In fact, my grandmother had 10 children. She had 11, but one had died. So she had 10. So I had uncles and aunts and cousins. And it was such a close-knit family. My grandfather passed away a few years before the war, but my grandma was alive. And when the big-- when that big Day of Atonement 1942 was when they evacuated our town to Treblinka.

Now, you went into hiding.

Yeah. Well, that was-- that's true. That was before. That was. The hiding to the Polacks was from the ghetto. We had a large ghetto and a small ghetto. The large ghetto is when my grandma, everybody was still there but they couldn't find us, to one part of the city. But on Day of Atonement, right after a whole day praying, being in temple and fasting, the Germans surrounded our ghetto and took everybody out.

We also had a hiding place then, right across from where we lived. So my mother said to me, go to temple and get Grandma. Bring her here because it doesn't look good. So I went to Grandma, and I begged her. Grandma, come with me. It isn't good.

She says, I will not leave the temple. I'll go when everything is over. She was a religious person. And she begged me to go back. I wanted to stay with her. But she says, no, you go back. I'll come. But that evening, after I left and went with my mother into hiding, they surrounded the temples and took everybody out. And most of the people went to Treblinka. We never heard from them again.

Very few survived-- my aunt and two cousins or so from that enormous family. So it isn't-- it's difficult.

Do you remember-- you said you were religious, so was--

My grandmother was.

You grandmother was.

Very.

Was your family, though, itself very religious? Did you sit-- how were your holidays? Were they-- did you celebrate them religiously?

Yes. Oh, yes. That was something that everybody did. But we weren't that Orthodox, like my grandfather or grandmother would be. However, a holiday was a very important occasion.

Now, your-- that was your mother's family. Where was your father's?

They were about 14 kilometers away from us. My grandfather also had a tannery. He was producing soft leather-- sole, leather for sole. My father was manufacturing soft leather and suede.

There was very few of those factories in Poland. So they were really-- they were mostly on the outskirts of the city. And they needed a lot of room. And it takes a lot to do from a raw leather. So the smell, it was outside the country.

So the only thing we have now besides your children and your husband is the one aunt or you have?

Yes. I have an aunt, my mother's younger sister. My mother-- I lost my mother on September the 20th, 1974. She died from all kinds of complications. I don't know whether they were related to the war or not. But she wasn't well after getting out of it, as it was. She was-- well, we all were barely alive, barely walking.

OK.