Begin. Helena, if you could tell us something about your experiences before the war began, a little bit perhaps of your childhood, your parents, your brothers and sisters, and the kind of life that you had before war broke out in 1939.

Yes. This has been quite a long time. I am 66 now, and it's been 44 years since the beginning of the World War II. It's really my childhood which was quite sheltered. I came from a very wealthy family. My father was-- his name was Joseph Manaster. And he was a very rich man.

I was the eighth out of 10 children. So I had the three brothers and six sisters. And we were very close.

We lived in different places, because we went-- my father has a estate, and everybody came together for vacation. But during the year, we spent in different places, in different schools. But the vacations were wonderful. And that's how it brought us so close.

It was a religious home. My father had a beard and my mother wore a sheitel. That is the peruka.

I myself attended a religious school. They call it Beth Yaakov. And I myself was very religious in those days. I even remember when I started high school, and I had to attend it on Saturday too. I just was sitting and listening. I wouldn't touch a pencil to write.

So I think that explains my background. Even one of my sister was married to a rabbinical family, which my brother-in-law was supposed to become a rabbi eventually.

And so this was only till '39, such a sheltered life, even it was a tragic event. We lost our mother in '35. But as they say, life goes on, and we survived it with great sorrow.

But the big tragedy came after the war broke out. And there were so many places, and so many faces, and so many events, it's even hard to describe and hard to put it in chronological order.

Oh, let's say the war started the 1st of September, '39. And the state was in such a place where Poland was divided between the Germans and the Russians, because the Germans came from the west, the Russians came from the east. And it was a long time in Polish history. Poland was again divided. And we were just on the border with the Russians came.

And a month later it was October, and they nationalized. So naturally, they threw us out.

So you felt the presence of both armies.

Oh, yes. But from both the evils, the Germans were, of course, the worst one. We had to leave our place, which was the estate place. It was Orelec. And we went. We parted. We went in different directions.

But it happens that me and some of my brothers and sisters and my father went to a big city. It was Lwów. It was under the Russian occupation.

So we were living with the Russians, not admitting our past, because it was dangerous, especially for my father. But somebody denounced him anyway, and he had to leave Lwów also and go into a hiding place, which it turned out later, maybe that would have saved him from the Germans, because they would have sent him to Siberia. But we didn't know then what will happen later.

We lived under the Russian occupation till June 22, '41. And the war broke out between the Germans and the Russians. Once they had a agreement, but then, regardless of it, and there was a war between them.

And the Russians-- the Germans, rather, as it always was in their history, drang nach osten. And a week after the world war broke out, they were in Lwów already. And that's where the whole tragedy started, all the persecutions.

Do you remember their entry into the Lwów?

Oh, yes, very vividly. We were hiding in a bunker, or in a cellar, or in a basement for a week, because all those shellings and bombarding went on.

And all of a sudden, after a week, everything stopped and it was silent. And one person went out and came in into the basement, and he said, now we can go out now. The Germans are here. So it was a horrible expression laid on everybody, because we heard already about the atrocities, and we knew what to expect with them.

But there was no way to escape. We couldn't-- I mean, the Russians left us behind. Otherwise we would have gone with them. So we stayed in Lwów for a few months. And it was very hard in the beginning with the Germans.

You couldn't walk on the sidewalks. The food was rationed, especially for Jews, almost to nothing, unless you survive buying something on the black market. But we still lived in the same apartment.

And after a few months, they started to make a ghetto. And once we move in ghetto, it's entirely a different story. So instead, to join, in Lwów, the Jews in Lwów, to go to the ghetto, we were newcomers to Lwów anyway. We didn't know anybody. We didn't have any friends there.

We decided to go back to those places, to the familiar places where I was born, where my father has his estate. It was the German, everything already, so it didn't matter where you go. We had the same discrimination.

In the meantime, during the Russian occupation, I married in Lwów. My husband was then. He was already a doctor of mathematics. But he studied medicine. He was a student of medical school.

And as such, he got a kind of task and permission to live in a place to fight typhus, because the Germans were very afraid of that. And I was just his assistant. I wasn't a educated nurse. It was only I knew that what he taught me. But it was a excuse to stay with him and to survive.

And also, his mother lived with us. We lived in-- the assignment was to that village where my father lived once. So he knew the people. And he thought that they will be nice, as they used to be before the war. But of course, that changed too. But we lived there during the winter of '41 to '42.

What was your experience with the people that you knew before the war?

The people of the village?

Yes.

Well, they needed us because they needed a doctor. And it was-- it was almost free. If anybody wished to give us a few potatoes, or some flour, or something in food, that was the fee. No, we behaved. Not bad, I would say. They didn't harm us.

We lived in that village through the winter, taking care of the villagers. And from around, all around other villages, because there was no other doctor for miles and miles.

And in June in '42 they surrounded some of the surrounding villages, and took all the Jews. And they assembled in one place, like in a city hall, in one of the villages. And locked us up.

And we were waiting several hours. Nobody knew what happened, and how it was. And then the afternoon-- this was before noon. In the afternoon, the Gestapo came. And they started to register, take away everything what anybody had, any valuables.

Was this your first encounter with the Gestapo?

This was the second one. I think I missed one. With the Gestapo was the first one, but I lived through, and being in Lwów that time, it was a day for a holiday. Let's say a commemorative day for a Ukrainian hero, Petliura. And of course, they commemorated killing Jews. So they, whoever they found on the street, they took away. And we heard later they all were killed.

They broke into-- also into our apartment. I was sick then, a contagious sickness. I think dysentery or something, with high fever. But then they broke in and they wanted to take my husband. And I said, I am sick, and this is contagious, and you can get sick. Just leave us alone.

Oh, they thought that was everything-- But they took some of the badges as a gift and left us. This was the real first experience before that, with the Germans. And the second, really with the Gestapo, was then in '42.

When they came to us, they sent people to the right or to the left. I mean, till it came to us, everybody was one side. Let's say the left. When it came to us, they send my husband to the right, and they saw who he was, and me.

But his mother, they said, you can go to the left and you go to the right, so that we-- they set us free, but they didn't want to let her.

My husband didn't want to leave his mother. But I tried to convince him, maybe he will go to the Judenrat, or maybe somebody can help us. We didn't think that they will execute her right away.

So we came to that closest town. It was Lesko. It was night already. Of course, Judenrat wouldn't do anything. They couldn't do anything.

Did you try to contact the Judenrat?

It was night already, but we tried to contact them at home, some people. Jews still live with their-- in their places. But nobody did anything.

And at night, they took everybody. It was around 120, 150 people. Men, women, old people, children. Everybody.

We went back to that place after the war to exhume the bodies. Yes, to bring them to a Jewish cemetery in Kraków. But there was nothing to exhume. A small piece of some bones. Because we heard then from people in the villages that the Germans, before they left for good, and if that defeat already with the Russians, they came back to such places where they executed-- there was mass executions. They poured into ground some chemicals to dissolve them in.

Yes.

You heard of that, no?

Well, they did that in the camps as well.

Yeah. So there was nothing. But whatever was left we brought into the Jewish cemetery in Kraków. And still it's there. And there is [INAUDIBLE] with a monument, and there--

They're going back to us, so they let us go. They didn't know what to do now. We wanted to go back to that place where we lived. And we were on our way, on our way there.

And all of a sudden, we saw a car with the Gestapo. They went back for us, they decided it's better not to leave witnesses. But they did not find us, so we didn't go there.

And so we were in that last car. But we couldn't stay there either. We didn't know where to go or what to do without any means, without-- with nothing.

And you were aware that the Gestapo was looking for you?

Yeah, I mean all the Gestapo was looking for us.

My husband had a cousin in another town, in Przemysl, which was a bigger town. And he was a famous doctor, a surgeon.

What was his name?

Turkin. Maciek Turkin.

So we decided to go there. But it was-- you couldn't travel. It wasn't permitted for Jews to travel. When we got the-- from a doctor, a from Ukrainian doctor in Lesko, kind of a certificate stating that I am sick, and I have to be hospitalized. So they let us go. And then we went by car, or truck, or somebody took us. It was three hours driving. Took us to Przemysl.

We came to Przemysl. It was almost the end of June or the middle of June. And then we stayed with a-- the cousin took us in, and we stayed there for one week. And they started to make a ghetto in Przemysl. So we moved together with them to that ghetto.

But it's hard to describe events after 40 years, what it means moving to a ghetto. You see those streets. People left behind almost everything just with the necessities, with their lives. Moved to that small area which was so tremendously overcrowded.

So naturally, as soon as they make that ghetto, it was so many thousands and thousands of people. So they made right away an action.

I see.

And it was the first action in Przemysl, which took 30,000 people. They called it in German Umschlagplatz.

Umschlagplatz.

Where they put. But they tried to deceive, and we believed them, that there's resettlement, that it's not a camp, a concentration camp. It is just resettlement to some places, to the Ukraine, where we will work. We didn't go because my cousin got a permission from my husband-- he was also a student, a medical student-- that he needed him. So at this time we remained there legally.

But I can still see that horrible thing, what happened with the 27,000 all, this is later around 30,000 people taken.

You remember them being rounded up.

Rounded, yes, seeing them on the Umschlagplatz. But nobody could help anybody. And some people went there willingly. It was so bad in the ghetto. Maybe there will be better. But later we knew they went straight to the gas chamber.

Yes. Did anybody have a sense what was going to happen?

I don't know. I don't think so. We didn't expect that it will be just such a Holocaust, that they will kill absolutely everybody. And there was always a hope, oh, maybe the war, the war will end, the war will end. People were listening to the news from abroad, even having a radio, the punishment being death, but some people still risked.

So we lived in that ghetto, which was shrinking each time after it was several actions. For a few months, and the time was at least four or five actions, each time for another category of people-- sometimes children,

sometimes from the hospitals, sometimes elderly, mostly women, mothers with children.

At the very end, it was left only young men were left to make a workshop. The able men could still work there. They had such a place, a workshop outside Przemysl. It was a small town, Radymno.

They took there several hundred of men. They were supposed to work too. I think they had a pipeline building. And they needed a doctor. So my husband volunteered to go there. And I of course with him.

So we left the ghetto, and we went to CAMP which wasn't bad there. It was-- It was a hard life at the camp. But even before that, before we left the ghetto, my cousin got in contact with somebody who made false papers, and people tried to escape, moved into hiding places, or passed for Polish people if their appearance and language wasn't suspicious.

Because this is very important, how you behave. It's not only the features. There are some characteristics for Jews. I don't know what, but I was told that nobody ever suspected me, that I was Jewish. And I think I spoke Polish without any accent because this was almost my native language. And I'm by nature very quiet in comparison. So I didn't behave like this. They say the Jews are so aggressive.

According to the stereotype.

Yes. And the gesticulation. So my cousin or my husband's cousin made papers for us too. But we didn't have the courage to leave ghetto. We didn't have any money. We didn't have anybody to go out. So we tried to stay as long as possible to live, no matter the conditions. We stayed in ghetto, and we stayed in camp at least being ourselves.

[SIGHS] That reminds me, we want to hear something about that life in camp, which wasn't different than life in ghetto, even maybe more so because we were imprisoned. We had the permission to go out sometimes to the city. But otherwise, the workers didn't have that. They just went to work, from work, and that's it, and we lived in those barracks.

We were a little more privileged. We didn't have to share the barracks. They allowed us to have a bed with a cot in a small room, which was a clinic. There'd be some of the patients.

I see.

But it's unbelievable how people are dying. We see robust-- I mean, they looked robust-- men, and the next day you look around, dead. There was no resistance in the bodies. They were so exhausted from hard work and with very, very poor Food it was just one slice of bread, if you can call it bread, and a little soup, which was water cooked and rotten cabbage. Till now I cannot stand the smell of cooked cabbage. This always brings back the memories of that camp.

And in that camp, they also made the same as the actions in ghetto, but they called it selections.

Selections.

The sick and the weak they selected, and they killed them. Took them outside-- and I remember once such a horrible thing. One young boy was one of the selected ones. And somehow he broke away from the group-- they led them to the cemetery-- and broke into the clinic and start shouting, doctor, save me, doctor, save me.

It was not known how to save him. There was nowhere to hide him. The whole room was probably three by five, a very tiny just place. And there was Ukrainian police after that, and they took him away. It's also one of the things which haunts me all my life.

Watching him being taken away.

Watching him being-- he knows they got killed already. So finally after four months, they finished the task,

building that pipeline. So what do you do with the Jews when they finished? They don't recycle them. They just killed them.

Yeah.

So they locked us up again. One day, it was February '43 already. They locked us up. They took away all the documents and whatever anybody had, valuables. And we were supposed to wait. In the morning was the Gestapo was supposed to come to kill us.

We entered the clinic. There were metal bars in the window, and it was one of the rooms of a small building and the next room with the German lagerführer and in a huge room before us was the Ukrainian police, and it was four policemen watching us. They locked us up, and they were watching.

Sometimes they opened the door. We couldn't escape. It was metal bars on the window. There was no way to escape. But nevertheless, they still opened the door. But maybe they were afraid that we will commit suicide before they will kill us.

Nobody knows why. We waited all night. And in the morning was a very-- that what we call a miracle happened. One of the policemen was off-duty, and another was tired, and somebody else went to have breakfast. One was left, and this one was also tired of watching us all night.

He opened the door, checked on us, closed it, locked it, took out the key, and left. At that moment, my husband said he was so alert, and he said, if you want, we can try to escape. Because he had another key to the door.

When we came to that camp, one of the former owners or workers of that factory gave us another key. He said, keep it. You never know. Maybe it will be handy. And it came handy.

I think I told you once. I said, if I will write a book, I will call this chapter "Escape Through The Keyhole."

"Escape Through The Keyhole."

So he opened the door with the key, and it was winter time. It was still dark outside, and we were so badly dressed. We opened the door and then just-- and we had those Polish documents. And we just ran back to-- the first place of course to where to go was to that man who gave us the key.

He was very sympathetic. He used to give us some food during the months we were there. We went there. First of all, they gave me a babushka and a coat and something because I was hardly dressed. And they said, of course you cannot stay here.

So we just start walking. We walked and walked for hours. There was snow on the ground. We took off our-- those emblems, the Star of David, and we have some other signs for that factory. It was a R, I remember.

It was a [INAUDIBLE] kommando and some numbers. And we put everything under the snow, and we walked, and we said if somebody will ask us, we will pose for a merchant. We are looking for food.

That was very common. People came from cities to the villages to buy because there was a shortage for everybody, for everything. So we came to a village. We didn't know where we were. We just walked ahead of us.

We came to a village, and we went to a house. And it was such a-- it was a Polish house. And we said the same story. We wanted to buy some food, only we didn't have any money to buy food.

We rested there for a while. And that man, why he was home? It wasn't a Sunday or Saturday, but he was home. It was winter time. The villages didn't have too much to do.

But it was noontime already. From 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning till noon was already half a day walking for

us. We were sitting in his house, and he went out and came back pretty soon. And he said something peculiar happened in that camp. Supposedly, the doctor and his assistant escaped from camp. They are looking for him.

We said we have nothing to do with that doctor. We don't know who or what it is. But he said, just to be safe, I don't know who you are anyway. So you just go. But he gave us information. Asked him where to go to the train station, and he gave us the information.

We went to the train station, walked another few hours. We came to the station. It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon. In war time was a train once a day. Nobody knew the hour when it will arrive.

So we were just sitting there and waiting. There was nobody there yet. We were the first one to arrive. We were sitting in a corner and waiting for the train. And pretty soon people started coming in, also waiting for the train.

Whoever came after us told the stories about that hunting for the doctor and the nurse. And everybody was checked, and each person asked the other one what could it mean? Did they check you?

And that was the hard thing. They surrounded the village, mostly with the dogs running around. But it didn't come to the station. The station was outside the village. So they didn't think of it, that we were in the station.

But you heard them?

We heard what they were doing, that they were looking for us. But we just sit there for a few hours. The train came at 6 or 7 o'clock in the evening. But till then it was a full-- what do you call it-- waiting room on the station for people who came in. And everybody-- it was going on for hours, checking everybody.

They were crazy. They were so mad that they would escape. It was so many policemen. How could he escape and they couldn't find them? It's just like disappeared and they're dead. But the train came, and we boarded it, and we went to a different part.

I see.

That was another world. We were not anymore ourselves and our names. We took out the papers.

Do you remember the train ride?

The train went to Przemysl, back to that place with the ghetto. But for us, it didn't matter, wherever it took us just to go out from that place first. And Przemysl was another bad experience. Before we left the for ghetto and then out of ghetto, we left some of the things which our cousin left before he left the ghetto with his friend, a Ukrainian friend.

That man thought that we came to ask to give us back those things. So it was-- we arrived there. He wasn't home. His wife took us in the middle of the night. When he came, he was very angry. And he said, if you don't go out right away, I'm going to denounce you.

But he didn't. And he just told us where to go to the station. So we went, took again the train. And we went back in the same train. We passed it again, that Sosnica, the station where we were waiting all night before.

And I saw through the window those policemen still standing with the dogs and probably still looking for us. But we went with that train to Krakow. I don't remember how many hours, but on the train there was again German police came in, and they were checking. But they didn't suspect anybody to be Jewish or an escapee. They were just looking for food.

But how could I know? They were checking me all around and looking for something they want from me.

Yeah.

We've survived all this, and we came to Krakow. Now we are somebody else. Our name was Dobrowolski. We didn't have any money. We didn't have no where to go what to do but my husband studied all the years in Krakow mathematics and then medicine, and he had some friends. So we just said, we will try.

Nothing could be worse than that, so we [INAUDIBLE]. Let's see. We went to one doctor, was a bachelor. I don't remember his name, but I can see the street and remember the name in Krakow. And we stayed with him for three days because he knew. Hiding a Jew was a death penalty. So people risked their lives to help us.

We were there three days. The meantime, he got this connection with the underground. So that's how it started, that life in a different skin, almost life on the street. As I said, the walking with death on your side. Because any minute, anybody will be suspicious or anybody will say he knows that I'm Jewish. That was it.

And I was pregnant. And this was the worst part of it. The worst later later they say may be the best. I didn't know what to do at the beginning.

My husband had a friend who studied together with him medicine. She wasn't in Krakow. She was there in another part. And she married an Austrian, and she was on the east side. She was an engineer.

They lived in Vienna. I just got a letter from them. Their name is Samrod, but her mother, her name was Maria Stupka. She helped us. We were there with my oldest son Arthur who was born and lives. And we survived. This is a great deal of her help.

We spent days there because it was very dangerous to be on the street. How can you walk all days? The money we got from the underground we used to buy places, to pay for-- I wouldn't call it a hotel, just a place to sleep overnight. And the days we spent on the streets, in the parks, on the banks of the river, in the churches, mainly in the churches, and a great deal in the house of that Maria Stupka. We could take a bath there and get a meal.

Nobody suspected Maria Stupka?

No. We tried not to embarrass her too much we. Just came once in a few days, not too often. And spent there a few hours, which was very important. And she got in touch with the doctor and gynecologist and told her who I was. I thought I would get an abortion, and she didn't want to do it.

She said it will be much easier for you to survive being pregnant because nobody will suspect that a Jewish person is pregnant. And they just leave it, she said, to God. Whatever will happen, if you will survive, so it will be the child. Otherwise, what you will lose? So we will die later. Why should we do it now?

But I still didn't have a place where to stay. We were still walking the streets and meeting in the churches because we didn't walk together because there's also big suspicion. Once I had an arrangement with a family that I was supposed to stay overnight.

They didn't know who I was. It was a wife of a Polish officer who fought in the underground someplace in Hungary. So the Poles felt obliged, I suppose, a patriotic deed to help such a person. So I was supposed to stay overnight with that family.

But the night before I didn't have where to go. So I thought of myself, what would be the difference? I have to go there tomorrow I don't know where to go tonight. I will just go in the last minute before curfew. They cannot throw me out.

Sure.

I just don't know how I got that courage. And that's how I did it. I came there, and they were very surprised. And it wasn't according to their plan. There was a party or something. I said, I will just sit in the

hallway and wait till everything end. And then I will go wherever I go, I suppose, to sleep.

I was sitting. It was midnight in the hallway. It was a joint apartment with somebody else. Turned out later it was a professor of Polish literature, and he was a known anti-Semite.

What was his name?

I really don't remember exactly. Troyanovsky or something like that. His daughter, she wasn't married. Was by education a nurse, and she was involved in a Polish organization who helped the such people like me, let's say Polish people or Polish orphans, which they used to bring from other places where the Germans killed off the parents.

She saw me sitting and got suspicious, asked who I was. I told her that my husband was an officer and he is fighting in the underground, and I don't have a place where to go. And she arranged for me in a monastery. It was in Kraków. The order of them was Capuchin's order.

They had several buildings, and they gave away one building for refugees or for sick people. And she was in charge of that building.

I see.

So that was a blessing. She put me in that monastery. And I said, oh, what a miracle. Here I will survive everything, to the end of the war. It was the summer of '43. It was just the middle of the war.

Who could believe that I will survive so many years like this? I lived in that monastery expecting the baby. I mean, I might try to help them a little bit in the kitchen or something because I wasn't so sick. I didn't do anything.

And when my time came, I went for the delivery to a hospital which I arranged by myself. Of course, everywhere I was the Dobrowolska and I was treated as Polish. It wasn't a good time for Polish people either because they sabotaged. And the reprisal for that was horrible. There were several places in Krakow and Warsaw, just on the street people, whatever they did.

And this was their way of doing-- catching people in the street and executing. So innocent people who were never involved in politics or underground lost their lives. So I've been to the hospital, and it was October already. Arthur was born October 6.

And that manager of that home for the sick people, his name was Tadeusz Liec. And he was very sympathetic. It turned out later that he suspected he knew who I was, that I was Jewish. He was by education a lawyer. He was a religious man. He was involved in the church and helped them as a minister.

He took me to the hospital. On the way to the hospital, he asked me how I will name the child. And I said if it will be a son, it will be your name. I really called Arthur Tadeusz. For many, many years even after the war, I just couldn't change it.

What was his response?

Oh, he was very pleased. He was very moved. So after the delivery, a few days later, I went back to that monastery. But Arthur was a very sickly child. And several times I went with him to the hospital. And people who were there in the monastery, they said, oh, the child is so sick. It will die, and you have to baptize him.

I tried to explain that I want to wait. My husband will come back after the war. But I couldn't put it off any longer. So I really baptized him, and he has a certificate of baptism. Yeah. It didn't hurt him.

No.

But it was very strange for me, coming from such a religious background, to baptize a child. And when I

talked to them of my mother and father, it really hurt.

But he survived. Thank God he didn't die.

Thank God.

When he was three months old, I think, the nurse, she used to come to visit with me. And once she came, and she asked me whether I want to take another. Once, she said, you have one child, would you like to take another child to take care of?

It was an orphan they brought from the East, and she was a month old. All right, it was Krysia. I don't remember exactly. I think Krysia Sernecka. She was so neglected. Nobody thought that she will survive.

I took her and nursed her and raised out of her a beautiful girl. So I had two babies to take care of in that small room. Like in a monastery, they have the small rooms.

And there I have two or three times very bad experiences. Once I was sitting with both the babies in the yard. They had a huge-- we call it the rose garden. And I see two Gestapo men are approaching me. And they came straight to me. So I thought they came to take me.

Oh, I think I have to go back for something else, a very important thing when Arthur was born. I first finish this in the garden. They came. They looked at the babies. They looked at me. They even made a remark that Arthur was a beautiful baby. He said that he sleeps so beautifully.

They turned away, and I never knew who they were looking for, what they did, why they came. But I could assume they came from me.

Yeah.

Well, I always say that Arthur was born in Gestapo's assistance. And this was a whole other chapter. I'm just jumping. I don't know how it will come out. That's what I said. It's not in order. When I was in the delivery room, a nurse came in, and she said, you have to get up. The Gestapo is waiting for you in the lobby.

So of course I thought that will be the end. But it was explicitly she came to me and asked me to get up, and we will [INAUDIBLE] there. I came out, and there was two Gestapo men standing, looking at me. We went out.

But I was calm. I didn't say anything. They looked at me, and they left. That was the miracle. It turned out later that they were checking on the midwife who broke the curfew. She came to assist me, but it was curfew. It was midnight.

And you kept your composure.

As I said, that's my nature. That's how I survived. Otherwise, all those times when it was sure death, that I would make one move and say something or show some fear. So that was it.

So what else should I tell you?

Where was your husband at this point?

Oh, he was in Kraków. I used to see him occasionally. [INAUDIBLE] But we were not together.

Weren't together.

No. He had-- because he still got from the underground help. So he used to find a place because he was still walking the streets, and that's how it was. But I still-- I didn't survive in the monastery. When Arthur was seven months old, I had to leave there because of that other encounter I had there.

Was one day in the morning, I opened the door to bring in water or something. And at the door was attached to a mezuzah. Somebody wanted to give me the message that he knows who I was. But I didn't have where to go. I took it off off of the door.

It was just the shape of a mezuzah. The mezuzah in the old country used to look like blue wrapping paper with an opening for the finger where you touch it and you say the [NON-ENGLISH].

Yes.

You know? Somebody touched it, and other people suspected me of being Jewish. And whoever quarrels, there were people from all kinds of walk of life and all kinds of different places of the country. They said they were going to denounce that Jews are hiding here.

After the war I heard that there was somebody else really hiding, an elderly man who I knew. He used to tell me stories how he prayed to the Virgin Mother and to Jesus, and they helped him to survive. He was Jewish too. I don't know what happened to him because I had to leave.

That Tadeusz came one day, and he said, the Gestapo will be here tomorrow. So it's better for you to leave.

He was giving you the message that he--

Yes, he knew. No, he wasn't a message. It was a warning. He was really very sympathetic. He was the one who Arthur was named after him.

Yes.

So I left. And it was-- this was August '44. It was still half a year till the end of the war. Well, this was a very, very bad time. Now I was with a baby. Krysia I had to leave there. They wouldn't have given me anyway. I didn't have where to take her.

I had to leave her, and I heard later a Polish family took her and adopted her. And then it started really, I would say, with Arthur. For six months, here two weeks, there a week, there a month, from place to place. I cannot even describe it. I don't know how I could survive this.

Moving from so many places.

From so many places with a little child which has no shelter, no food. Of course, I nursed him as much as I could through the war. And then I lived for a few months in a place. It was a young woman. She was half-Jewish, and she was very much involved in the underground movement.

Her father was a Polish officer who was in England during the war, and her mother was Jewish. The mother was hiding in another place, so she had that apartment. But it was said that I am a relative from the other side, anyone would ask. Because the neighbors knew.

So I lived there like in the lion's den. But it was better than on the street. Yes, we were liberated in January '45.

I see.

In Krakow. And there we stayed.

Do you remember what it felt at that moment?

It was a little bombing, not too much. It was a lot of commotion in the streets, but I didn't go out. There was robbery, and especially the liquor stores and other things. The Germans flee like crazy, and Kraków wasn't too much destroyed because the Russians who liberated us, they didn't come from the East, which was

natural. They liberated Krakow from the West. They surround it.

And they moved in.

They moved in. So of course, there was joy. It's unbelievable joy. They were happy to be liberated. Well, we started to build a new life. And then people started pouring in from camps, whoever survived. And people start looking for relatives.

I didn't know that anybody survived from my family. I didn't have any contact. And I thought the only place to find out anything was again that Lesko, where we all were born. But there was unrest after the liberation. Because the Ukrainian wanted to have a separate, independent--

Country.

Yeah, country or country or something. So I couldn't go there. I was just walking from Krakow the streets and looking in people's faces, and maybe I will recognize somebody or somebody will recognize me. And it really happened like this.

It was May the 1st, which is a holiday in the Communist countries. And I was walking the streets, and somebody-- I saw somebody was approaching me, straight to me. He came closer, and I recognized it as a cousin, which was from the same place. And he had the same name as my father, Joseph Manaster.

He touched me. He looked at me. He just couldn't believe it. He thought he saw a ghost. He said, you are alive and you are here? And he saw the baby on the blanket. He just couldn't believe it.

And so of course, we started talking, and he then he told me who survived from my family. So unfortunately, only two brothers and sisters survived. [SIGHS]

Can we stop for just a moment, I think?

Yeah.

One of the things that we might go back to that was really quite interesting is what your life was like after leaving the monastery. There's so much to remember, I know.

Yes.

But are there episodes that you could remember?

Yes, a very interesting episode was I had arranged-- we always had those places to go, this time with Arthur, Tadeusz.

Tadeusz.

And the person wasn't home. I came to that building, and I was sitting on the stairs waiting for her. It was a single woman, and the apartment belonged once to a Polish policeman who was on the bounty list. I didn't know that. It didn't matter anyway.

I was sitting several hours waiting for her. I didn't have diapers to change. I remember such a thing. I took off my slip, whatever I had underneath to change the baby. And I was sitting on the stairs and waiting, waiting. I thought eventually she will show up, midnight or whenever.

I don't have where to go anyway. I was sitting on the stairs. I went-- as a matter of fact, I went to the stairs to the very top to the ceiling because people were walking in and out and see a woman with a child is sitting on the stairs.

Eventually, she came. So he took me in. And when I lived there, after a week or so came the German police.

They came-- it was the middle of the night. Three of them, they came in to look for that policeman because I mentioned it was his apartment, and he was on the bounty list.

By the way, he had that custom to check everybody who was in the apartment. So I got up, and I was holding here Tadeusz in my arms. And they were sending with those rifles. I remember one was smiling because Arthur thought it's a toy, so he touched the rifle.

At that time, I had already different papers. I wasn't more Dobrowolska, because every time you move you have to have different names. And then I had a paper that I was somebody from the East. We took it from the East because they couldn't check on the East. The East was already recaptured by the Russians.

So they wouldn't be able to check. So it was safer, but it was not such a Kennkarte that they called ID. It was just a paper saying that my name's so and so. I don't remember what it was. Maybe Skotnicka, some other-- is from such and such place from the East. I don't remember the place.

Where did you get these papers from?

From the underground. They always-- but the papers were-- if somebody would look at them, really closely would know.

Yes.

Yes, and they didn't have any ground. And there wasn't any certificate, birth certificate or something, because I know that some people had certificates after dead people. But in this case, it was just a paper.

And they turned to me, and they say, why don't you go to the police and get yourself a Zuzugsgenehmigung? That means permission to live. And you will get a Kennkarte.

But in order to go there, that was-- you remember that Uznajski went with me. You have to have somebody who will witness that knows me. That was a friend. He was also a doctor, then a student of medicine.

He was a friend of my husband, and he went with me to the police. And he said that he knows me and he knew me from my childhood, and my name is so-and-so. So that was enough. They took it, and they gave me--

But this was almost the end. It was in '44 already. I don't remember exactly the date. But at the very end, I got very official papers.

But you were still on the run at this point.

Oh, yes. I still was because I didn't have places to go. I lived in several places. But I still went back to that apartment, to this police apartment for another few weeks. And then you have to run again.

But the liberation-- I survived till the liberation in that apartment of that person. I told you, that young woman who was half-Jewish.

Yes.

Her name was then Zofia Eisler. After the war, she married one of the officials. Was Karl Bender. But he's not alive anymore.

She helped me. She really helped me a lot. And I lived in her apartment.

You lived with her there,

Till the liberation.

Are there other episodes during those few months in Krakow while you were moving from place to place that come to your mind?

I wasn't prepared for it. I didn't think of it. I remember one place I lived outside of Kraków, in Zwierzyniec, some other places. But no, I really don't remember such things because there's too many of them.

It's one right after the other.

I couldn't stay longer than-- nobody wanted to keep me with a child. It was six months I could stay at most, two weeks, a week.

Do you remember rescuing people?

Most of the people didn't know who I was. Very rarely somebody knew. I remember once I lived in an apartment where a Gestapo man lived. He was away for vacation or something. She took me in into her small room. In the old country, they have separate rooms for servants. I slept with her in the same bed.

And one night, he came unexpectedly home. He had a huge dog, and she was scared. So was I. This was before even Arthur was born. And that the dog-- she covered me with the blanket over my head.

And as soon as I could walk out, I just ran away. This is really to live in a Gestapo's house.

Another escape through a keyhole.

Another escape, yeah. Well, I think Bukowski was interested in those times after the war.

OK. When the liberation comes. Do you meet--

When the liberation comes--

Do you hear about your father again or?

No, my father and all my cousins and whoever, relatives and uncles and aunts, they were all taken first to a camp. They made a camp in a place called Zaslaw, and then they all took him to Belzec.

I see.

They were. One of my brothers escaped from the train. When they took them from here, they took some tools with them. They said they will try to escape. But probably only he escaped, and they shoot after him, and his whole clothes was full of holes, and he finally fell on snow.

I mean, we take it as the date of their extermination, the 14th or the 15th of January. It was in '43.

But your brother they took for dead at that point, and he escaped.

He escaped. He ran. He escaped from the train. They took off some-- you know those cattle trains?

Yes.

I didn't know there were bars also. But I think they took off some boards, and he escaped. And they promised each other they will all try to escape because my sisters, my brother-in-law, they were all young people. Even my father was only 60 years old then.

Well, we don't know whether they tried or they were just gassed in Belzec. But that brother escaped, and then he went into hiding. There was a man in that small town in Lesko who also got a medal from the Yad Vashem.

He took my sister and two of my brothers. They were hiding there. And he had six children, a wife and six children. And they didn't know. They were-- or you read the book. They survived just underground. And he risked the life of the whole family.

And he was stealing food from the children to feed them. Righteous for his life, for the children's life. You don't hear of too many people like this. And he's still alive. He lives in Poland.

What's his name?

It's Zwonarz, Jozef Zwonarz. He's now 85. He used to say my brother knows I'm a Jew like you. If they catch me, they will kill me the same as you. Yeah. But after liberation, I think this is the nature of the Polish-- majority of the Polish people, maybe the government. It's always very anti-Semitic.

I read recently a book written by Singer. It's a brother of the Bashevis Singer. He described the Brothers Ashkenazi. You read it?

Yeah.

He described it when Poland was freed after the World War I. Because there was no Poland. Was divided for 150 years, was enslaved, occupied by the three--

Powers in Europe.

Yes, Germany, Russia, and Austria.

Yes.

As soon it was a free Poland, the first thing they started was killing Jews. I didn't know those stories. He described some stories, how they locked up Jews in a synagogue and set it on fire. Oh, horrible things.

One of my cousins, my uncle was killed in 1990 there in Poland it was just in the middle of the night. My father was thrown out of the train, robbed and thrown out in the snow. He was a strong man, so he survived.

So it means that every time we got a free Poland, the first thing you start is to beat-- that they have a saying, [POLISH] after the Six-Day War, when the Jews won the war in Israel, they had another saying.

They said once they used to say [POLISH] means "beat the Jew." And then they said [POLISH], beat like a Jew.

It's an interesting change.

Yes. It's the Jack Eisner brought it out. He said it's a different Jew now. He came out after the Holocaust. Yes, it is a different as a Jew now.

When did you see your brother again?

After-- now after so many years?

No, after--

After the war? Yes, he came after when I met my cousin.

I see.

And he sent a message, and my brother came the next day. So I saw him. He came to Krakow.

You saw him after all of that.

Yes.

Do you remember that day?

I remember it very well. I was just crying. I just couldn't believe that he survived. Yes, it's amazing. After so many years, it still brings back tears. Yeah.

He meant a lot to you.

No, of course. I remember seeing my sister after-- the first time after 26 years. After the war, we were in contact. We knew that we survived. We hadn't seen each other.

We met in Czechoslovakia in '66. And that was a very, very moving meeting too. I remember the place. She stayed in Marienbad, and all the people around crying.

Can you describe that day when you saw her?

Yes, I came to Czechoslovakia. It was Marienbad. And she stayed in a pension. It was Kafka's, I think, the name. The receptionist didn't want to let me-- I wanted to go up to their room, because I knew it will be moving. How else could it be?

But there were some regulations. She didn't let me go, but she called her to come down. I was looking at the stairs, and I see a little lady was coming down the stairs. I just couldn't believe that that was my sister. When we parted, we were young. I mean, she was young, chestnut hair. It was a gray lady walking down the stairs. Yeah.

And then she saw you and you said-- did she notice you?

Oh, she recognized me right away. Because I was always a little gray. I turned gray very early in my life. And I didn't change too much. But she changed tremendously. She's the one who survived and wrote that book.

Yes, but talking about discrimination and persecuting Jews after the war, there was-- we were liberated in '45. In the same year there was-- they call it a pogrom, like there used to be those pogroms in Russia, in Kyiv, Lithuania. There was a pogrom in a small place like Kielce.

They killed off-- there were several families. They lived in two buildings. And they just killed everybody, the children, everybody. There were people who came back from Russia, happy to be liberated. They went back to Poland and were killed.

And there was a lot of unrest. Jews didn't settle anymore in the small places, just in the big cities, Krakow, Warsaw, Wroclaw. In Krakow, in some Rzeszow, and other places it was a lot of unrest. I don't know whether there were cases of that, but I know there was a lot of unrest.

The atmosphere was like a pogrom. People were afraid to go out.

Do you remember your thoughts at Kielce when that happened and you heard about it?

Oh, it was in the papers. It took several days or even some weeks, but some papers came out to protest, to say something about that, why the government didn't interfere. Why did they allow to do that? Because they just let them do it.

It's an old pattern.

Still, the police came because everyone was dead. Now, this was in '45. Then things calmed down and

people settled back from different places, mainly from Russia. Because whoever was liberated by the English or the Americans, they went to the West. They never come back home.

Then was again in '56 when Gomulka took over. It was also unrest, and always this affects Jews.

Anti-Semitism.

But the biggest anti-Semitism came back in '67. We left Poland in '68. There was a connection with the Six-Day War in Israel. Russia broke the relationship with Israel, and so did Poland. The people from the Israeli embassy left Poland. All the affairs were taken over by the Dutch consulate.

And it was a very, very bad time. It was once was a big speech of Gomulka, and it was always almost like the atmosphere was we were afraid it might be a pogrom. We don't eat too much.

You had to feel the atmosphere.

But the outcome of this was like this. He said they opened the borders, and Jews are free to go. I mean, there were a lot of restrictions, but at least we could leave the country. And the Dutch consulate took over. It was said that the way was to Israel through Vienna, but you had to register. And we got one-way ticket and no passport, just a travel document.

And what else? Have to give up or ask them to release us from citizenship. So we were stateless until we got American citizenship. We were stateless.

At the end of the end of the war, what made you decide to stay in Poland, especially after the pogroms?

Yes, that's a good question. I really didn't want to stay there. And whoever survived, my family, he was abroad already, and I had cousins in Chicago too. But my husband somehow wasn't ready to go. I still don't understand why.

We had papers and affidavit in '45. This was right after the war. Then we had-- the next time was in '58. We even had-- we went for a visit to the consul, and he gave us a permission, a promise for visas. There was almost everything ready to leave the country. And my husband said, again, I'm not ready yet.

And then came '68, and I said, I'm not waiting anymore. He still wasn't ready. The children are grown, almost all of them. The youngest was 12 years old. And they wanted to go because it was a time that everybody who felt Jewish left the country.

All the old people. Right now is there 2,000 people? It's almost judenfrei. And so I said, this time I'm not waiting any longer. If you are not ready, then you will come whenever you are ready. And I was happy that the children wanted to go. And we all left in '68.

Do you remember--

When I came to Vienna-- when I came to Vienna, the people in the HIAS said, you are another Moses. You took the children out from Egypt. Yeah. But we had visas already to the States. My sister applied for us.

So we got the visa. The visas were in Warsaw, really. But they didn't trust, the government, to give it to us. They sent it to Vienna. We picked it up in Vienna. And then we had another encounter on the border. They kept me on the border for 24 hours.

Oh, there was some legal procedures when you leave the country like other Jews, you had to make a list and whatever you take or you don't take. And you can do it only once for a family. And since I left without my husband, and he said I will do it when I leave, because all the books and whatever he had, medical instruments.

And so I only took personal belongings, but it was too much, supposedly. Not only this, I think a year earlier,

I was visiting in Israel. I was in the state visiting my sister who died half a year later. I haven't seen for 30 years because she left Poland in '37.

And from here I went to Israel. So I had an Israeli visa on my Polish passport. So maybe that also contribute to it. Anyway, they kept me on the border till the next day. So it was quite an experience to leave Poland. I remember when the train, and that was Robert, when we finally passed the last checkpoint, and we went to Czechoslovakia. And he said, now you can be free, breathe free. We passed all the borders, so they were not coming anymore. Oh, they made it personal, searching. It was--

Yeah, that was '68. And I came to the States with three of my children. One went straight to Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where he lives. And from the three of them, now each is in a different place.

Arthur, the one who was born during the war, he lives now in Scranton. He teaches computer science. Robert went to Israel. First to the Netherlands, and now he lives in Israel. How long, Robert, 10 years?

And the youngest is Alexis. He is a professor of linguistics in the [INAUDIBLE]. So you know him.

Yes, I've met him.

And I lived in Chicago for 14 years, working there in an office. Learned accounting and worked in accounting here in a charitable organization and retired last year.

Retired last year.

And now I'm leaving for Israel. I'm leaving as a matter of fact tomorrow.

Tomorrow.

So this is not the end yet.

Moses is still moving.

[LAUGHS] But they say-- you know that saying, why it took 40 years? Because the generation who left Egypt should die out. No memories from the old country should be brought in. I think maybe this also inspired me to come back to my name. I told you I changed my name.

Yes, you did.

I took back my father's name. I think, yeah.

You think of him?

I'm the only one who has his name because, you see, usually the sons carry the father's name. My brothers who survived, they, for security reasons, they changed the name. From Manaster they added the Polish ending ski, Manasterski.

I have three nephews they live in Brazil but their names is Manasterski. So it's not Manaster. The first one Manaster is Alexis because he took my maiden name instead of a middle name, and he makes it Alexis Manaster Ramer, but he is still Ramer. So I think I'm the only Manaster.

To preserve your father's name.

My father's name. And it is really just his honor.

Yeah. Well, you loved him.

You know, I wish he had lifted. I mean, we as children, we were quite afraid. That was still old-fashioned

upbringing. It was called respect.

Patriarchal.

Yes, he was a patriarchal figure. He was an unbelievable smart man. My cousins who still remember him from the old country, everybody tells stories and remembers him. He was an unbelievably smart businessman.

He had a friend who was a lawyer, and he always has-- let's say a private lawyer because he had so much business. And he said once to him, you know-- his name was Fink. He said to him, your education, your diploma and my brain would make one good lawyer. That's the famous saying. They all remembered it for years. Yes, he was really very smart.

It sounds like he was a strong man too.

Very much so.

The way he kept on going.

Yeah. Till he perished in the gas chamber. I don't know. Is there anything else to add to it? As I finished in that paper, if the atomic bomb will not finish us, so maybe we will go on.

Maybe we will go on.

I said Arthur has now a son. He's five years old. So [INAUDIBLE] if not for the atomic bomb, I will go on.

There's just more life.

That's what life is all about. Oh, we will see. Do you have any other questions?

I have just a couple of questions. Do you remember when the war ended-- excuse me-- why you decided that you wanted to leave Poland? Did you feel that you just did not belong in Poland?

Oh, not only-- first of all, the family, whoever was left, still remember the attachment. And my husband used to say, if there wouldn't be a sea, the ocean, you would probably walk there.

Yes.

Yes, I wanted very much.

It was no longer home.

No, everything was strange. It was again just survival, I think. And even economically, it was very hard for us in Poland. My husband wasn't a practical man at all, a scientist. He never earned enough money.

So it was difficult.

So it was quite difficult. Yes, it was. Especially I was born and raised in a rich home, so it was quite hard.

You were used to something different.

Yes, I used to-- I worked very hard, doing all dirty work by myself and washing clothes and carrying coal. Yes, it was hard.

When did you see your husband again after the war?

Oh, we saw it all the time. We were not separated for long. Because we were in the same place in Krakow.

And you went on for another 23 years, really, in Poland.

Since from '45 to '68. 23 years. Yeah, I never counted. Yes, but now it's 15 years we have been separated, and we don't have any contact anymore.

Are there other things that you care to recall that you remember or find valuable to share?

I really don't know. Unless you help me--

I'd be glad to.

--with a question. Because it is so hard, so hard to recall such things. I think 40 years is quite a lifetime.

Yes, it is.

Yeah, I think that's-- I think that's enough.

Fine. Thank you.