

Oh. We were a family of six people. We had four children-- two boys and two girls. And, of course, my mother and father.

Mm-hmm.

We were middle income people. And we had a fairly nice living quarters. My father was an architect, and we had a furniture store also. And my father was very much for education for the children. As a matter of fact, my brother Leon was going to go to college. My father planned for him to go to college.

There were colleges in Lodz. It was a beautiful, cosmopolitan city with parks, museums, opera, theaters, and a very, very modern city. And we had lots of relatives in the city. We visited with relatives, aunts and uncles and cousins, Saturday afternoon. We didn't ride. We just walked five, six miles.

There were no telephones, but we were very comfortable without them. We just walked to an aunt and knocked on the door, and there we were with all the children. And it was a nice, warm atmosphere. It was a nice relationship between relatives. And we lived in a very, very nice neighborhood.

Can we back up for a second, and can you tell me your name, and your name during the war, and your date of birth?

My name during the war was Paula Garfinkle.

Mm-hmm.

And I was born in 1920.

Mm-hmm. So your birthday?

December.

Right. December 3rd, right?

Yes. And--

Was your family orthodox?

Very religious.

Mm-hmm.

Very religious.

My father was a Kohen, and he observed Shabbat and Friday night. On Friday night, everybody had to be at the table with the dinner. My mother was orthodox. She came from an orthodox family. Rabbis, and-- she came from a little town next to Lodz.

Mm-hmm. What was it called?

Constantine.

Constantine. OK.

And, of course, I was born in Lodz. All our children were born in Lodz.

Mm-hmm.

And we led a very nice, interesting life. My father was very much interested in his children with homework. And he-- we had the special table to do our homeworks. And he was he was very much with each child interested in their schooling, and so on. And well, it didn't take long. And I remember in the 30s, we started hearing about Hitler on the radios in the newspapers and what he is trying to do, and the atmosphere changed into sadness.

Can you-- where did you go to school? Did you go to public school?

I went to-- no. I went to a gymnasium.

Oh, you did?

Yes.

Uh-huh. And did you attend a Hebrew school or have any type of Jewish--

Yes, yes. Yes. I had a tutor that came three times a week and taught me how to read and write Yiddish. I read Yiddish very well.

Mm-hmm. Did you speak Yiddish at your home, or--

Yes. We spoke Yiddish.

You did.

Yes. And so the sadness came and just like a damper on everybody. But then we still proceeded our lives with the shabbat, going to the synagogue. And my father was very interested in politics and in current events. And he knew what it's going to be-- that Hitler is coming to power.

He came to power. And there was a great fear that we are going to be caught in it. And then came 1938 and, of course, 1939 when Poland was invaded. And then the trouble started.

Mm-hmm. Can we still back up just again?

Yeah.

Did you have specific interests and hobbies or anything that you enjoyed doing when you were young?

Yes. I was enjoying and doing knitting and crocheting and sewing.

Mm-hmm. Did you take lessons, or you just knew--

No, I just-- myself. And I still sew.

Oh, wow.

And I still knit and crochet in my spare time.

Mm-hmm. That's great. And everybody-- my brothers were very talented. My youngest brother did-- oh. He made pictures. What do you call it? He--

He drew them?

Yeah, he drew. Painted and drew. And all my sisters and brothers, my sister, they were very talented. And we got along very nicely.

Mm-hmm. Did you play any musical instruments?

No.

Mm-hmm.

No.

Have any pets?

No. No pets. No.

Were you involved in any Zionist groups?

Oh, yes. All of us where. Lodz was-- Poland is, all the-- even the little towns, the youth was involved in Zionist activities. My brother Henry used to belong to an organization, Gordonia.

Mm-hmm.

And my sister used to belong there. My older brother Leon also belonged there. I belong to-- all of us belong to Gordonia.

Mm-hmm. Wasn't Gordonia a socialist--

No, it was a Zionist.

[INAUDIBLE] Gordon?

A Zionist organization.

Uh-huh.

Yes.

But it wasn't a religious One.

No.

Right.

No. It was just a Zionist organization where we came together and then we had discussions. And it was a very interesting life. Very interesting. You did have to worry where you're going to go tomorrow, what the plans are tomorrow, the next day. You just went to the organization. There were always people there and always discussions. And then you went to aunts and uncles. I, of course, did not have any grandparents because they had died before I ever got to know them.

Mm-hmm. So a close, tight-knit family.

Yes, yes.

That's nice.

Everybody had a close tight knit family in Poland. Really. Had large families. My mother had five sisters, and each one of them had families. And we were very friendly with them. We went to visit. They came to us. And it was a very interesting life. A very nice, easy thinking life.

Mm-hmm.

To make a living, it was very hard. But still, the week went through, and we came through and made a fairly hard but good living.

Mm-hmm. And did all the children in your family attend gymnasium?

Just Leon and I. The other ones would have, too, but they were two young kids.

And a gymnasium was a private.

Yes.

So that have had to cost quite a bit of money.

Yes Yes.

OK. So did you graduate gymnasium?

No, I couldn't graduate.

Uh-huh.

No. The war broke out, and it was chaos.

What year were you in when this was happening? Were you about to finish?

Yes, about to finish.

Mm-hmm.

About to finish. 18. About to finish, but nobody thought of it. We just thought what to do. All of a sudden, we heard bombing. And we concentrated in cellars and basements. And people were going-- people didn't know what to do. They were going to children, and children went to parents, and there was a great chaos.

Mm-hmm.

And then because the Nazis came in just a few days after they invaded Poland. They invaded Poland in 1939, the 1st of September. And to us, they came in the 7th or the 8th of September. And right away when they came in, we knew that they were there, and they rounded up Jews right away, and they did their job right away as they came in.

It was a Friday and a Saturday. They went to the synagogues, and as the Jews came out from the synagogues, they made them take out their tallithim and clean their vehicles. And they were beaten and kicked, and--

Where were you? Were you hiding at this time?

We were at home.

Mm-hmm.

We didn't know what to do. And the Polish officers that were still there, some of them. And we asked them, what should we do out there on the street? And they said, sit at home. Sit at home. But they escaped. And then we went home. And then in a few days, they caught-- we couldn't go out. We were afraid to go out. Everybody was caught on the street and sent away for work.

Some of them never returned home. Some of them were beaten, and when they came home, they were beyond recognition, bleeding from the nose, eyes. And we knew there is-- that Hitler came in to carry out what he was preaching all these years.

And we were in our homes for a few months. It was from September till about December or January. And we had laws every day on the walls, posters on the walls. We couldn't ride the street cars anymore. And the Jews shouldn't walk on the sidewalks. Should walk in the center where the buses are running. We couldn't walk on the sidewalks.

And another law we had-- Jews had to tip their hats if they saw a Nazi passing by. And there were shootings in the streets, the Nazis were they are and they saw a Jew passing by. They could shoot him. And it was a big chaos.

Did you ever witness any of these shootings?

Yes. Everybody did. Everybody did. We hardly could go out to buy any food. There was no food for us. The Jewish stores were closed because they were afraid, and they couldn't get any merchandise. So there was already a hunger. We couldn't go and buy food.

And then there was, in a few weeks, they put posters that we will have to go to a ghetto. Leave our homes. And also, we had to wear the Jewish star in the front and in the back, and whoever will go on the street without it will be punished by death. Everything was punished by death.

And then in, maybe in January, we went to the ghetto. But in street by street, section by section, we went to the ghetto. We could only take just what you saw. Just a few blankets, a few pots, a few pans/ and we were assigned to a ghetto. But it was about five or six kilometers away from the city. It was very slummy there. Shacks.

None of us ever got there. None of us ever was there. It was a section that none of the Jews ever went there. And there were broken windows and broken doors. And we were assigned for our six people a very small, little room. Maybe 12 by 16. We had to push ourselves in.

We went several times to bring a bed to bring everything. And then, all of a sudden, there was a law in a poster that the ghetto will be closed. Anybody will be met outside of the ghetto. And not anybody. Any Jew will be shot to death.

And so it happened to a lot of people, a lot of Jews were shot because they wanted to go back to their homes to bring some more things, and they never came back to the ghetto. So they put around a fence, the ghetto. And there were guards outside the ghetto every 50 meters with weapons, with guns. And the ghetto was in progress. The ghetto was there.

And there, we did not get food. Every 10 days, we got a ration. And, you know, coupons. You got a piece, a wedge of bread. We got two, three potatoes. Go a little sugar. A little oil, black oil. And a little salt, and maybe a little vegetables.

But this was to be for m for 10 days. And people ate the piece of bread up right when they got it. And naturally, a great percentage of starvation. People were dying. Dying from hunger. People were swelling up to their ankles. And overnight, the swelling went off.

But then the next day, it was again, the swelling came up again. And the swelling went to the knees, and then to the heart, and people died. My father was sick of this. This, you called the ghetto sickness. And people naturally had to go to bed.

So because they couldn't walk, they had swollen feet and water bags under the eyes. And my father was in bed and couldn't get up. And my father was about 6-foot 2". A healthy man of 52 years old. And he was never sick a day in his life. He laid in bed until this sickness advanced to his heart, and he died.

How long-- after how much time in the ghetto did this happen?

This was in 1942.

Mm-hmm. So you had been for three years.

Yes. He died at the age of 52.

What did you do in the ghetto all day long?

We worked. The established factories, and we worked for the German government. This was the biggest centrum of factories. There were shoe factories. Clothing. A lot of clothing factories. I was working in a clothing factory. Women's apparel.

What was your exact job? Do you remember?

Yes. I was sewing at the machine, on a machine. Sewing. There were cutters, and there were-- it was like just like in a regular, big factory.

Mm-hmm.

And we got the soup at lunch. We got the soup in the factory. It was water with two little pieces of potato. It was almost nothing. We were sitting there working with our empty stomachs, hungry. And then when we came home, we were just sitting at home. We didn't have-- we couldn't go out because there was-- after 5 o'clock, you couldn't go out in the ghetto. You had to be in the houses.

It was a very, very, very-- we were in this ghetto for four years. And after five, people in the houses, they gathered and they talked about politics. Everybody was upset. And they knew. And everybody said, oh, we are not going to survive it. They are going to kill us all out.

And then they had the Judenrat with Rumkowski. Have you heard of Rumkowski?

Yes, I was going to ask you about the level of organization that went on there and if you ever saw him or had any--

I saw him many times.

Uh-huh.

I sat with him like I'm sitting with you. And he was a very, very nasty man. He beat people just for nothing. He rode around in a couch with horses with one horse. Yes, one horse. And in the ghetto when you walked in the street and you heard the horses, the horse, you knew that he is in the neighborhood somewhere, and everybody was hiding because he could call anybody that he laid eyes on and beat them up for just for nothing just because he wanted so. And he was like the king in the ghetto.

Yeah, he called himself king.

Yes. Chaim Rumkowski, yeah.

Chaim Rumkowski. He was assigned on the money. I still have a five mark ghetto money.

Oh, really?

Yeah. I could donate it maybe to the museum.

I think they'd be very interested.

Really? Yes. I have to look for it. And the families kept on decreasing. He got orders every day, or twice a week, or three times a week, to surrender 5,000, 10,000 Jews. And he did it. He did it. He sent out notices to people that they have to gather, come this and this day to so and so. And people went, and they were sent away. They were sent away to death. We knew that they went to send away to death.

Mm-hmm.

Then--

What news did you have at this time of the camps and things? Did you know about?

No, we were cut off the world. We did not know what's going on, what's doing outside.

We could not go. They had guards on the outside of the ghetto, the outside the fence. And on the inside, there were Jewish policemen. But the Jewish policeman could not go near the fence 10 meters. The Nazis on the other side could do it. Could go near. And very, very often, a person who went a little closer was shot to death.

And in the ghetto, there were, they divided-- it was divided. The ghetto was divided into two parts because in the middle, there was a thoroughfare that led from the big city, from Lodz, to little cities. So they built a bridge over this street. It was the same ghetto, but they needed the thoroughfare.

And people were walking over the bridge. And sometimes, the guard, he just felt like to shoot somebody. And plenty people fell down. They just picked them up and threw them over the fence into the ghetto. So those were non-Jews walking over the bridge.

Jews. They were Jews. They were inside. They were Jews.

Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

Ghetto inhabitants.

Right.

Yes.

Now, there was a street car that went through the ghetto, right? Is that correct? It was through this thoroughfare that I'm telling you about it.

Right. But they couldn't get off.

Oh, no. No, no, no.

Were the windows blocked up, or--

Yes. Yes.

And how about news of other ghettos? Did you know about Warsaw and things like that?

Little rumors. There were people who had radios. People, special people who built radios. But this was-- the government should know. It was hidden.

Right.

But then they caught them, and they shot them to death. We did not have any communication with the outside world whatsoever. And then they wanted to liquidate the ghetto, and they stopped giving the rations. There was chaos. We didn't get any coupons for food anymore. There was no food at all.

This was in '42 or '43?

'44.

Oh, already in '44.

Yes.

I see.

Because they wanted-- Himmler was calling-- they knew that they are losing the war, so they wanted to get rid of the Jews before. And Himmler was calling to get rid of the Jews, get rid of the Jews. So they went on their own, the Nazis in the ghetto. They just did what they wanted to get rid of the Jews.

And there wasn't one family that people were not missing. They were missing, and there were dead people lying all over the ghetto. And just people had to-- and there was Biewbow. Have you heard of Biebow? He was the leader, the Nazi leader of the ghetto. He was hanged after the war.

He said, if we would go to the train station, because people were hiding. People by hiding on the attics. People were hiding in basements. And they were going around with hatchets and opening doors and hacking open doors and taking people out.

We were hiding, too. We lived in the Little shack where there was an attic on top with a ladder. We went up the ladder and pulled the ladder up and put the trap door down and were there all day long without food, without drinking, without anything. And there were cracks. It was an old shack. And we saw the Nazis going outside with hatchets and looking for people, for Jews.

And at night, 5 o'clock--

I keep looking just to see if the tape is running. I'm sorry, you can keep going.

5 o'clock, we could go down. They went home, so we were free to go into-- one time, there was this woman who went up with us in the attic. And it was maybe five minutes to five she went down. It was a little early. And she was caught on the street because it wasn't five o'clock yet. And she was running. And the Nazi was chasing her.

And where did she go? To the place where the ladder was. And he saw a ladder that was-- he knew that there are people up there. And all of a sudden, we saw a head of a Nazi soldier. And there were elderly people.

And my brother, my youngest brother, my older brother Leon, and Sarah-- they weren't there anymore. We didn't know where they went. I mean, we didn't know-- they were in the camps, but we didn't know what happened. We found out after the war.

Would they had been picked off the street?

Yes, yes. So my brother Henry, when this Nazi came up, my brother Henry went to the-- he knocked out the wall,

because there were wooden boards. He knocked it out and jumped to the neighboring house. Me, they had me on here like this. And I was pulling myself out.

He had a piece of my dress in his hand. And I was running. I was bleeding. I was scratching myself bleeding from here and all over. And they were chasing me. And somehow, I escaped them. Because they were sending people away. They were sending them to Chelmno. Have you heard of Chelmno?

Mm-hmm. The death camp.

Yes. There, the people were shot to death. So this was a few days before the liquidation of the ghetto. And then in about a week or so, they went around and were shooting in the air to scare the people.

So the next day, we went to the train station. My brother Henry, my mother, and I. And we were put into a cattle wagon. And when we heard the heavy hardware closing outside, we were pushed in full, full to capacity.

And we were driving about a day and a night. We came to Auschwitz at night. And the doors opened. In the wagons, there were cries. We had no water. No food. Nothing. We came to Auschwitz, and the doors opened, and there were the Nazis waiting for us.

And they were screaming, everybody out. Alle raus! My mother was very weak. My brother Henry was a young-- like a child. He was sick in the ghetto. He was hemorrhaging in the ghetto because he didn't have food.

So we were separated, women from men. And they separated him right away. So I was with my mother. And we were standing there. There were lines and lines. We proceeded very slowly to the gate, to Auschwitz. And my mother was linked-- hold me here. She held me here on my arm.

And we came through the gate. There was a bunch of Nazis standing there. And they had big flashlights like this because it was night time. They looked us in the eyes and the faces. And when I came, there was Mengele. I didn't know it was Mengele, but later on from the pictures, I knew it was him.

And when my turn came, they looked me over. They looked my mother over. And they talked to my mother like this. Go to the left. I didn't know what this was. So now, I am only one left of six people. And we were-- I was going to the right. There were thousands and thousands of girls. And we were standing there like this all night. All night.

And in the morning, we were taken to showers. We had to disrobe. Take off everything and stand there naked. Completely naked of hundreds of Nazis there walking around. And then we had--

What month with this?

This was in August. 21 of August, I told you, the ghetto. We had to leave the ghetto. And we took showers. And then they shaved our hair. We didn't recognize each other. And then we got, so to speak, we got clothes. They gave us a dress. From dead people.

I got a big dress, a long dress. I could hardly walk in it. And then we had to run to the barracks barefoot on the gravel. They put us in the barracks. There were bunk beds, three tiers, with all wood. Plenty of splinters.

14 girls in one bunk bed. At night, we couldn't sleep at night. Some of them were about to die. Some of them died in the morning. They never woke up. We didn't get food yet. We didn't get food. We didn't get anything.

And I was sick. I came with a fever. I was sick in the ghetto. I came sick. I had temperature. And then, they called out, who doesn't feel well and who is sick, would go to the Revier? They called the sick, the hospital, Revier. And I wanted to go. And my-- the girls didn't let me go. They wouldn't let me go.

So we were several days in this atmosphere in Auschwitz. And then transports came on coming and coming and

coming, and they didn't have a place for us in the barracks. So they put us out one day in the field, a big, big field, naked.

We were sitting there all day and all night and we were waiting till the next morning to be gassed. To go into the crematorium. And the Nazi women-- there were Nazi women, too. They told us, you see? Tomorrow morning, you'll be going out with this smoke. And we saw the smoke coming out. The ovens were working day and night, three, four shifts, day and night. And we were supposed to go into the ovens the next morning.

So the next morning, a miracle happened. Somebody, a Nazi from Bremen-- there was a hard labor camp in Bremen. They had an order that came from Berlin. I had the archives that says it. I will show it to you later. And came from Berlin that they needed 300 girls, and they should go to Auschwitz to take 300 girls.

So this guy came to Auschwitz and wanted 300 girls, and they took 700 to select. You know, a little scratch, a little pimple or a little-- they didn't take. They went to the ovens. I was between 300, and we went to Bremen. Also in a cattle wagon. And--

They gave you clothes?

Just one layer. Just one layer. Barefoot. And we came to Bremen. Bremen was a city all in rubble. And we came there to clean up the city, to dig ditches, to being beaten every day, because the Nazis wanted us to select the bricks and the stones to put-- to select it because they needed this material to build temporary houses for the bombed-out Germans. So we were working at this. We were working there for nine months. Also, without food, a little water with soup, and being beaten. And plenty of our girls died there.

Where did you sleep at this time?

We had bunk beds. Two-in-one bunk bed. And we were there about nine months. And--

Until July '45?

No. Until, like, April.

OK.

We came in August.

OK.

The last of August.

Mm-hmm. Like, September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April. About eight, nine months we were there under those circumstances. And then there was an order from Himmler that the camp has to be evacuated. And they evacuated us. We went to the east because the Allied forces were coming from the west.

And we didn't know what was happening. We did not know anything. So they took us into the east. We went there under-- Germany was bombed terribly. We went there under heavy bombardment. We went there day and night. The trip lasted about two weeks on the way under heavy bombardment. We were laying in the woods at night. And we saw the sky lit up red from the bombardment.

But under those circumstances, we came to a place named Bergen-Belsen. They chased us into Bergen-Belsen. And when we came in there, as the gates opened, the Nazis came and pushed us into a barrack. It was-- we couldn't see anything. We couldn't ask. And they were whispering because later on, we found out that they were reconnaissance planes cruising above. So they didn't want to have any noise.

They pushed us into a barrack in the dark. It was pitch dark. Pushed us into the barrack already filled with people. And we didn't see there are people. And people were on the floors and standing. When you stood up like this, you had to stand up like this. There was no place to put down the other foot.

And there was a chaos, and there were screams and yells, and they wanted us to be quiet. So they opened the doors and spilled in several boiling water on us.

Oh, my god.

Boiling water. And we quieted down because lots of girls died immediately, instantly. And this went on all night. And in the morning, when we came out, outside, we saw mountains and mountains and mountains and all over dead people. Mountains, like-- people, young people without eyes already deteriorated, with pus.

And we met some girls there that we recognize from our neighborhood that were there. And they told us they were there longer than we. We just came. And they were also sent from other camps. And they said, here, this is Bergen-Belsen. Here, you die from the stench of the dead people. Over 50,000 people laying around in mountains.

And we did not get any food there, either. We picked up a piece of grass and the dirty water. We went down on our knees and drank like animals. Just like animals. We were taken away our dignity, and we were just like animals.

Can we stop? And I'm going to flip the tape over.

Yes.

OK.

We were-- we didn't have a place to sleep. We didn't have a place to be during the day. Then we were besieged by lice. We had lice from top to bottom. And then in a few days, we saw the Nazis, the women and the men-- there was Kramer was the Nazi leader. Have you heard of Kramer?

Mm-hmm. I thought he was in Auschwitz.

No, he was in Bergen-Belsen. And Irma Grese. She was the Nazi woman. And lice beseeched us, and we couldn't-- we knew that we were dying out. We knew. Every-- people were walking and falling dead.

And then one day, we saw all the Nazis there wearing white bands. White. We didn't know what that means. But now, then, we knew it was the white that they are surrendering because the Allied forces were near. We didn't know that either.

When we saw them with white armbands, we thought that was something else. They are going to dispose of us. They're going to shoot us. They're going to put mines, and we're going to be-- we knew that something bad is waiting for us.

But then they dug big holes, big ditches to bury all the corpses that were laying around. For this, they gave everybody-- they brought men from other sections. We didn't know that there were men. They brought men, and they gave them pieces of rags or belts to go to a corpse and tie it around and drag it to the ditch, to the pit, and throw it down. Untie, and go for another one, for another one.

And as this was going on, I became very ill. I was fainting. And I went away in another section. Put myself into a ditch. The Germans, the Nazis were still building new barracks for the oncoming people. They were still building.

And then my four girls noticed, my four-- when we marched, we always marched five abreast. And the five girls were very close with each other. And when the four noticed that one is missing, they went around to look for her. And I was missing. I put myself into a ditch, and I wanted to die. I didn't want to live anymore because I knew that it's no use.

But the four girls noticed me. They found me. They pulled me out by force. And I run a high temperature, too. That was April the 14th. And April the 15th, the following day, we were liberated by the British Armed Forces. And we did not believe it yet. We thought that the Nazis are pulling a trick on us.

But then we heard on the microphone, "ihr seid frei!" it means, you are free. And we saw different uniforms and different soldiers, and we realized that we are free. And then they caught all these Nazis. We saw Kramer being driven away. We saw all the Nazi women being driven away and put in a prison. And we were outside taunting them. But there were 13,000 girls died after because they couldn't eat the food anymore. Their stomachs were shrunk and sick. I was very ill then, too.

Did you have typhus?

It was the beginning of typhus, yes.

Mm-hmm.

And did they put you in a hospital?

Yes.

And British-- this is all British?

British, yes. British.

Uh-huh. But you were able to recover?

Yes.

Before-- I'd like to hear a little bit about what happened directly after the war. But before we get to that, can I ask you, are there any other specific incidents or episodes that happened during the ghetto period or your time in the concentration camps or in the labor camp that stand out in your mind that you didn't mention to me?

Like, my brother, my youngest brother, he hemorrhaged very often in the ghetto because he didn't have anything to eat. And then we heard there were some vitamins came into the ghetto. But the vitamins were very far, far away. I mean, the place where you get them-- you could get them, but very far away, and you had to go very early in the morning to stay in line.

It was, like I told you, the other part of the ghetto. I had to go-- there was a bridge. And then a little further on, there were gates. You opened this gate, and then you were on their territory. And then another gate to go into the other part of the ghetto.

And I went three times a week 2 o'clock in the morning at night so I could be there 9 o'clock in the morning to be the second or the third or the fourth in line, because then when lines build up and people were fighting and pushing, and I couldn't do that.

So I went 2 o'clock, and I was the third, or the fourth, or the second. Stood in line there. Opened 10 o'clock, and I stood there up for hours. And I got a little bottle like this like they gave out samples here, sample bottles. Tiny, tiny.

I got a little bottle. They called it Vigantol. It could have been some cod liver oil or something. And I brought this home. And the danger was when I went through the ghetto through the gate, I asked the Nazi if I could go-- I speak a good German-- if I could go through. He said yes. He could have said yes and then shoot me to death.

I knew the danger. And then I went to the other gate, and I had the same thing. And coming back, I had the same thing. I knew I was in danger. But I did it for my brother. And I came back home. In two days, I had to go again for the same

thing, and then in two days, go again for the same thing.

Then-- this was one episode. Then one day when we were cut out of rations, we didn't get any food anymore, everybody had to do-- it was a chaos in the ghetto. It was terrible. Didn't get any food. And where I worked, my place of work, I went to the window one time and looked down, and I saw potatoes growing there. The potatoes were plant by the head of the Kripo. That's criminal police. They shortened Kripo. His name was Sutter.

And it was a big field of potatoes. And I looked down, and I said to myself, oh, there are potatoes. At night, I'm going to come here and dig out some potatoes. And they were very, very dark nights. It was around July. And I needed something to eat for my brother. And also for my mother.

And I went. It was very dark. I took a sack, and I took a cleaver to dig. And I went there. If I would have been caught, I wouldn't have been shot because this was such a beast, this Sutter. He would cut me up in pieces.

But I risked my life, and I dug the potatoes, and I went and put it in the sack. And I tore off the greens, I just-- to get the potatoes. And I went home about four or five blocks. Took it on my shoulder. And we lived in the first floor. I opened the window from the outside and dumped the potatoes in.

Then I looked up in the sky and saw, it's still night. It is still dark. I go and take the rest of the potatoes. So I went back and took the rest. After the potatoes, there were some other. The green-- I forget the name of it.

A root?

Rutabagas.

Oh, uh-huh.

Yes. I took this and came home and dumped it. And this was in July. The last of July. And it lasted us a few days. And then we had to go. No, this-- yeah. And then we had to go out of the ghetto and leave the potatoes and everything anyway. We went to Auschwitz.

Mm-hmm. You're lucky that you didn't get caught.

And then I came to work the next morning, and I looked down the same window that I looked the day before, and I saw potatoes. And I saw there were maybe 25 policemen there and looked. And I was standing there shaking like a leaf. And I thought, oh. They would only know that the person that did it is looking down, they would cut me up in pieces. But I had to risk my life. Otherwise, we would have died anyway.

Mm-hmm. That's true. Is it possible for you to maybe to contrast for me? Can you describe maybe the physical surroundings of your home in Lodz before you had to move to the ghetto, and then what it looked like in the ghetto?

What do you mean the physical--

What was your house like in Lodz before? What kind of house did you have?

Oh, we lived in an apartment on the second floor. It was, like here, the third.

Mm-hmm.

And we had a very nice apartment with a balcony, a corner balcony. It was a nice apartment. As a matter of fact, I was there last year.

Oh, really?

Yes.

And you went to see this apartment?

Yes, I went to see this apartment. And of course, about three or four families lived there in this apartment. Polish people.

Uh-huh.

I sent the guard that took us, I sent him in first to ask if we could come in, if they were not going to harm us or something because they might have thought I'd come back to claim the apartment. But they were very nice, and they let me in. And you can imagine it was a big apartment because two or three families lived there.

I assume it's dilapidated by now.

Yeah. Oh, yes. It's dilapidated. Because it was under communist regime, they didn't do anything to renovate the building or to do anything. But the building I recognized. It was the same. There was a bus, a trolley was going by there. And there was the stop. And I saw the stop.

Mm-hmm. That must be an unusual feeling.

Yes.

And then when you move to the ghetto, then, you had this one room.

One room.

Was there any kitchen space, or--

No, everything in one room. Every thing in one room.

Was there a toilet?

There was no toilet. It was outside somewhere.

Uh-huh. For the whole building?

We just had a little shack. Two neighbors lived there. We and another family across the hall there. They had the same facilities. For water, we had to go with a bucket about four or five blocks away and take water from a water well. And there were hundreds of people there. Everybody went for water. And until you got yourself out of the crowd, you had a half a bucket of water.

This was our life in the ghetto. I didn't have too much of a teenage years, of a teenage life, because there was a damper put on all of the teenagers early in their lives.

Yeah. I mean, I suppose if you weren't allowed to gather with your friends and you weren't--

Yes.

Who had time? And everybody was sick and trying to survive.

Yes.

Well, if there's not anything, other specific incidents that you'd like to tell me about, maybe you could tell me what

happened just after the war.

Well, after the war, we lived in these houses. It was clean. We got our--

This was at Bergen-Belsen.

Yes.

So whose houses were before?

They were built for the Nazi soldiers. They were fairly new, like town houses. It was three kilometers away from the place that we were incarcerated.

Mm-hmm.

That's why they call Bergen, dash, Belsen. We had a free life. We could go. We could travel. We could-- we went to all around Germany to look for relatives because American organizations came to register people. They registered and they put their names on the wall on the outside wherever they were located. And people went through and looked the names up, you know.

And I was going there looking, too. I didn't expect to find my brother at all because he went to Auschwitz. He was young, and he was very weak from hemorrhaging in the ghetto. I didn't expect to find him. But people came to me in and that I met, that I knew, and said, oh, your brother. He is alive. He looks good. He's in Munich.

And I didn't believe it because there were so many mistakes made. People went. They were sent to see their daughter and sister, and it was a mistake. And it was a disappointment. And I thought, this will be a disappointment, too.

But one day, I was in my little room-- we were four girls. Four bunk beds. We were in our little room. And this girl from downstairs came and said to me, you know, some boys came from Munich, and they want to see some girls here. Maybe you will see your brother.

And I said, my brother, I know he's not alive anymore. I know I don't have anything to look for. She insisted, insisted, and dragged me into her room, and I came into her room, and there was my brother.

Wow.

So and then you stayed together from that point on?

Yes. We stayed together. We lived in Bergen-Belsen.

How did you-- were there reparations? How did you have money at this time?

We had got everything from the HIAS. The UNRRA. And there were Jewish organizations there. They looked out for us. And then everybody could go and do business and be free like any other person. You know? We were displaced persons, but we had our rights. And we could do whatever we wanted.

Mm-hmm. How did-- did you encounter, like, did you ever approach a German afterwards?

Oh, yes, plenty. Plenty. What did they say?

Oh, everybody said we didn't know anything about it. We didn't know anything about it. Like, Bergen-Belsen was here. The camp where they murdered the people, and there was a stench for miles and miles. There was a village, and there was a village.

And from here, everybody went by every day. From here, everybody went by every day. And they saw-- they smelled the stench and everything. And from the neighboring villages, there were people that worked here. And nobody knew what was happening. Nobody knew what was happening. They didn't know. They said they didn't know. But everybody knew they knew. They just couldn't open their mouths or something. It was a dictatorship. You know?

But no one was a Nazi. No one was an ex-Nazi.

Right. No.

Hmm. It's interesting.

Yes.

I'm curious personally to hear what happened. I talked to some other people who-- they said they confronted them. And they would say, we didn't know.

No. I confronted them, too.

Uh-huh.

We confronted them. And nobody knew anything. Everybody said they didn't know. And they were lily white.

Mm-hmm. So you spent this time until 1951 at this Bergen-Belsen compound.

Yes.

Recuperating from the war a little bit. And then had you--

We registered to come here. And it took time, of course. It took time.

And you came together with your brother, or-- when did you meet--

My brother came two years earlier.

Uh-huh.

In '49.

Did you meet your husband in Europe?

Yes. I met him when we went around to look for-- I said it before. When we looked around for our relatives or for friends, then I met my husband in Hanover.

Mm-hmm.

And he was with another couple, also two young people. And we went you are from Lodz, and you are from Lodz, and then we went together. And that's how we fell in love. And then in a few months, we got married. In October, we got married. '46?

'45. Oh, '45. Oh, so pretty quickly after.

Yes.

I see.

Yes.

Uh-huh. Well, is there anything else you could add to your story? Anything about before the war or during the war period that you'd like to tell me? Just for the sake of the record of our interview.

Well, you know, when my father died in the ghetto, they didn't have time to take the body away, right away. He was-- the body was laying with us in the little, little room for five days covered with his talit. In five days, they came and took him. They had a load, a truck. Not a truck, but a horse and buggy. Maybe 50. They threw the bodies up. Yes.

'42 was the worst, worst year. They went crazy. And when I was in Poland, in Lodz last year, I went to the Jewish-- to the Jewish community and wanted to see if they have some something that I could go to the grave. He looked at-- 1942, he said, you couldn't. They were just buried. Mass burials, and I couldn't find my father's grave.

There's still an organized Jewish community in Lodz now?

Yes. It's very small, but there is. I was glad to get out of there. I was glad to get out of there. It shook me up.

The Jewish life, and the synagogues-- The synagogues are not there. The people are not there. All the old-- there were beautiful, beautiful buildings before the war. But nobody took care of them for 40 years. The cement, everything fell off. And they were ornate. Such nice, nice-- when they built a house in Lodz, it took almost a year to build it. And they built it so nice and strong. But everything is dilapidated now. And I didn't see the people, and I didn't see the Jewish taste there. So it drove me out.

I can imagine.

Yes. Well, I want to thank you very much. This has been very difficult, I think, to tell the story.

Yes.

But we appreciate it, and we will make sure that your story is told.

So I thank you. Tomorrow--

OK. Before we end our interview, though, we just wanted to talk about a couple of things regarding the prison in the Lodz ghetto and some encounters that you have had with Chaim Rumkowski. What can you tell me about your knowledge, your further knowledge of Chaim Rumkowski and about the prison?

There was a prison in the ghetto. The prison-- the name was Czarnieckiego because it was on the street Czarnieckiego.

Mm-hmm.

And the prison both run by Jewish policemen and a Jewish warden, the head warden. He threw in people there for just stealing a potato indefinitely. He sent them in for a showing a crack in the window because the windows-- the windows were supposed to be blocked at night not to show any light. This was a leniency. This was next to sending them away to Chelmno, which was a death camp.

Mm-hmm.

In this prison, there were about 200 or more people. They were working there, hard labor work. I had an encounter with Rumkowski. He just sent police and said, arrest this and this person for stealing a potato, or for stealing a piece of bread. Arrest this and this person. And they came to the place of work, arrested me, and threw me into the prison for indefinite time.

Do you want to tell why, or you'd rather not? No.

OK.

Then what was it like for you? You were there four months?

For months, yes. I was there for months. And nobody could ask, is there going to be a court or is there going to be a term when I can go out, or-- No. Rumkowski just threw the people in. And whenever he wanted, whenever somebody wanted to intervene for you and talk about you, maybe you can get out from the prison into-- from the little prison into the big prison, which is the ghetto.

Do you know when, what year was it that you were--

It was maybe 1943.

Uh-huh. And you said your mother and your brother were able to come see you?

Yes.

Did you live in a cell by yourself, or--

No, I lived with them. With my mother and my brother.

Oh, no. But I mean while you were in the prison.

In the prison? By myself. You were all by yourself.

Yes. Yes. I was with another woman. Uh-huh.

Yes.

And they gave you-- and you worked? And you sewed there also?

Yes, worked there very hard. And then at night, I worked. I was sewing. They had the sewing facilities. And ironing, and sewing, and whatever. Not to let us go around and do nothing.

Mm-hmm.

He just wanted to harm the people. That's what he wanted. So you had no idea how you finally got released, or you just finally got released?

Finally got released. I didn't know why he threw me into the prison and why I got out of the prison. People were there. Two men were there, young men. They stole a chicken. And things like this. There were no criminals. No criminals.

It's just Rumkowski wanted them to be punished. He thought, it's not enough to be punished to be in the ghetto and have starvation. And this is how terrible, cruel, and mean he was. He turned into a beast.

You told me a story about in your factory when he came. Do you want to tell me about that on the tape? About the vacation and all that?

Oh. Oh, yes. There was-- some people were sent away for vacation, eight days. It was like a place where you got a little better food and you could relax. This was somewhere within the ghetto where the nice air and trees, and the gardens.

And as I was in the factory, I was very talented. And I was advancing from a lower job to a bigger job to a bigger job.

And the foreman of this factory wanted to send me away, too. There were many, many other candidates to be sent away for these eight days.

But Rumkowski had to OK it. And he had to personally view these people. If they look like they're going to die tomorrow or something like this, he would OK it. So he came and sat at the table, and there was a line of people. Everybody came and stood in front of him, and he observed this particular person how she looked, and-- she or he.

And the foreman introduced everyone to him. And he said he was addressed Mr. [PERSONAL NAME]. Herr [PERSONAL NAME]. This is so and so, and she was advancing from job to job to job, and she's very talented. And I would like you to OK her that she should go to this place for relaxation for eight days to have a little better food and so.

And he looked at me. Obviously, I looked too well in his eyes. And he said to me, go. We will wait until she'll advance more. And that was it, and he did not give me the permission to go to this place. So I know him very, very well. Several times during the ghetto I had eye contact with him.

Mm-hmm. Is there anything else now that we're talking again that comes to mind? Not necessarily about Rumkowski, but things that happen to you in your time there?

I can't think of anything.

OK.

So, you know--

OK. Well, thank you. I'm glad we turned the tape on again. It was important.

Yes.

OK. Well, thank you again.

And I'm going to present this money. It's a paper money.

OK.

Who should I come to? I'll contact you?

Yeah, you--