

OK, the date is Friday, June the 5th, 1992 and we're talking with Mrs. Sylvia Murawski in Annandale, Virginia. Mrs. Murawski, could you please--

Oh, call me Sylvia.

Sylvia, could you please tell me your name, your name that you were given in Poland and that you used during the war, your date of birth, your place of birth, and anything you possibly can about your childhood and your family growing up.

OK. I was born July 10th of 1928. My name is Sylvia. Was-- my name was Sylwia. Sylwia Anna Winawer. But I was never, ever called by this name. I was Dzidzia for a-- called Dzidzia at home.

How do you spell that?

Dzidzia. Let me write it down.

OK.

It was a nickname. Dzidzia. Something like it's-- something like this.

OK.

Dzidzia.

OK.

It was quite popular a nickname in Poland. And I was known as Dzidzia through my schooldays till the-- well, before the war. For a long time, I was an only child and I loved the status of being only child, and loved by everyone, and at center of attention, of course. I had the small puppy that I loved but she passed away as a puppy.

But later on, I had a sister. And my sister, in my life, played a special role because she was nine years younger than me. And I treated her something between my toy and between my child. And it was very, very, very nice feeling.

And my mother was wise enough to keep me believing that I'm the one who is responsible for my sister. So my friends at school were very jealous. Nobody had such a small sister or brother around. Well, I could tell you about my childhood. It was very happy childhood.

Did you live in a suburb of Warsaw or in the city?

No, I lived in the center of Warsaw. My father was a lawyer. And we lived in a big apartment. You know, those old days, everybody had maids. Everybody-- well, middle class people had maids. And well, it's such a distant, different life.

You came from a Jewish family?

Well, it's very, very hard to say about that my family was a Jewish family. We were Jewish because my parents were converts. So it wasn't strictly Jewish family. I was raised more in Christian traditions than Jewish tradition.

So your family had-- your parents had both converted to Catholicism?

My father was Catholic, my mother was Protestant. And on my father's family was family of assimilaters. Is the right word?

Well, they were assimilated?

Assimilated.

But they were Jew-- the father's parents were Jewish? Well, it takes some more explanation.

OK.

By face, they were Jewish, my father's family. My father's family was quite known. And I would even say famous family in Poland.

Your name is Wina?

Winawer. My father's cousin was a very well-known writer, playwright. My father's grandfather was-- oh, my goodness. Can you take that?

Oh, sure. That's interesting.

Famous chess player. And he won. He was a best in Europe. He won a tournament as a-- well, how do you say it? He was a--

Champion?

--champion. Maybe once, maybe. But he was a European champion. But he felt Polish. Because in those old years, it was a very strong movement of assimilation. And Jewish intelligentsia-- you know the word? Was very Polonized.

Right.

And so on my parents, my father's side, it was very natural that he felt more Polish than Jewish. And his conversion didn't bother anybody, I think. But on my mother's side, it was a different story. Because her family was more Jewish, more traditional and more Jewish. So there were some misunderstanding between my mother and her mother.

So did you ever see them?

Well, yes. My grandmother lived in Lodz. It's a big city in Poland--

Oh, sure, yes, I know Lodz.

--with big Jewish and German population. And she used to come over for to visit us twice a year, stayed for a few weeks. And there were always some misunderstanding about synagogue, about Christmas, about something. I felt it. It wasn't very open, but I felt there was some tension about religion.

Did you have any religious instruction? Any formal instruction?

No because my parents weren't very religious people. It's really hard to understand in America why people change their faith only to show that sort of belonging to Polish society or something.

I think it was, in Europe and in Poland especially, it was a form of social mobility.

Maybe.

Definitely, definitely.

Well, for my father it was sort of patriotism. Maybe. He was very young, it was naive. It wasn't very wise, what he did. But on mother's side, it was because she-- my father wasn't Jew. I don't know how the situation was between Jewish and

not Jewish marriage. But I think that my mother wanted some change, wanted to conform to my father's standards or something like this.

But it's interesting, then, that number one, that she chose Protestantism, and number two, that he wasn't a Polish Pole, he was formerly of a Jewish-- you know, they still had this.

Difference of religion, yes.

Yeah, I mean they still came from that background. And that's interesting.

The times were of utmost political atmosphere. And social atmosphere changed so quickly in Poland. So some things that in 1921 or 1920 were appropriate might be less appropriate in 1927 when my mother got married.

I never asked my parents. I just accepted the situation that I was put. My father was Catholic, my mother was Protestant. And children were Protestant, too.

We had two Jewish girls in our class. And they were taught religion by a rabbi. And I was taught religion by pastor. And Jewish girls didn't feel-- it felt ill at ease being Jewish. It was such an atmosphere in Poland. I don't know why it was like this, but it was like this. But we used to go to Protestant school.

And you didn't feel different? When I spoke with Jana in Boston, she said even though she was raised with these Catholic parents, she said she knew they were different. She knew something about her family was different than all the other Catholic people. You know. Did you have a sense of that?

Well, was something was different. But it wasn't different because of religion. It was different because of-- I don't know because of what. It was different because I think that my parents were more independent people than most people around. More free-thinking, free-thinkers. Well, better-educated or something like this. More open mind.

What was your mother's education?

My mother's formal education wasn't very high. She was orphaned. Well, not complete orphaned. Her father died when she was 13. My grandmother married at age of 16 with no education at all.

So when she widowed, she widowed at age of 33 with three teenagers. Well, two teenagers and one small girl. Two teenagers and one small girl. And it was the end of the war, end of the First World War, in 1917. And they went through a real terrible poverty.

And my mother was extremely brave, and industrious, and ambitious, and beautiful. You can't see now, but she was. And she didn't accept. She was more like American women, not Polish.

She didn't accept the whole situation of being poor, and poorly educated, and living in lower middle class family. So she, as an external, she tried to. She got a high school diploma. But she didn't finish high school. But she made her diploma, went through exams as an external? Is this the right word? No, you don't say this.

External student, kind of?

Something like.

Yeah.

You can say.

And she took any chance she had in life to be among interesting people, to learn things, and to see what. She spent few years in France.

How did she do that?

Oh, she was a student, she gave lessons, she tutored. She worked as a tutor. Sometimes, she was a tutor living with a family. She was very popular with people, very, very easy to make friends. And when she married my father, she had some few years of college but she didn't finish college.

But she had many talents, many interests. She was interested in art. She got a real knowledge in art, especially in China, in oriental rugs. And during the war when we were alone and my father went to the army, she started buying and selling things. And this is how we survived the war. Because she was able to earn that money.

And after the war, when it was forbidden and very, very dangerous, she did the same. So my parents were very well-to-do people. So I never went through-- never, it's not the right word.

But most of the war, most of the time, the war time, we were well-to-do in sense that we weren't hungry. We, and the friend of my parents, and relatives of my parents had always at least one meal fixed at my parents' table.

I see. Can we back up a little bit?

Yes, sure because if you start the story of your life, it gets extremely poorly organized. Unorganized.

That's fine because we'll just jump a little, no problem.

So what about your schooling? So where did you go to school? Did you go to private school?

I went-- it was a private school. The name of the school was very long name. It was a private school. Supported-- not supported by.

It was run by or founded by.

Founded, run, and something more.

You want to look it up?

No, I can't because I don't remember even in Polish this is the right word. And under the help, under the supervision and help of a Lutheran church.

And there were two schools. One, the Szkola Reja, that school was old, very, very well known in Poland, in Warsaw for boys. And after the First World War, there was a parallel school for girls opened by the same Lutheran church. Imienia Wazowny.

It was a Waszowna, it was a sister of Polish king from 16th century. They were Protestants and the patron of the school was that Protestant princess of the past.

I see. And the school, Rej High School, was very well-established and very highly accepted school. Was more for girls. But it was OK. It was OK.

Now would that be--

The atmosphere was very liberal. Everybody was well-bred, tactful. And I didn't feel-- I felt at home there. I didn't feel any that I didn't belong. I belonged. I belonged perfectly well.

The education there, then, is equivalent or better than a Gymnasium? Or is it at the level of a Gymnasium education?

I didn't. I didn't get. I didn't go that far because when the--

When the war broke out.

Yes, I finished, I was in elementary school. It was fifth grade. I finished fifth grade. And I started sixth grade. And then the trouble started.

Now, did you take ballet lessons, or any music lessons, or anything like that?

Music lessons and not ballet because I had no talent.

Me either.

Very poor ear for music, no talents for dance. Nothing for drawing. I had only very bad marks on all of those subjects.

Did you enjoy to read?

Read, yes. I was good in reading, in history, in writing.

OK, well.

I had a extremely nice, sweet teacher of religion. She was a saint. She never, ever-- sometimes Christianity is in conflict with Judaism. But it wasn't the case. I never felt that something against Jews in my teaching of religion, in whatever I learned in my religion lessons. So I didn't feel anything wrong about my double personality, let's call it.

But you didn't even feel that it was a double one?

No, I knew. I knew. It wasn't a secret. It wasn't a secret. It wasn't anything to keep in hiding for us. My family was very proud of being one of Winawers.

It was very special thing that my father tried to explain me before he-- when he visited me before he died. It was the last visit and last like saying goodbye. And we were very open with each other. And he told me, it's very hard to explain. But I felt more Polish than Jewish. It didn't have anything to do with my religion.

That's understandable.

So it wasn't more like trying to hide whatever you were. My parents were Jewish friends. And the best friends, they didn't feel like my parents. They felt very-- how to say it? Rebellious. They felt Jewish and rebellious. It wasn't to confirm to Polish standards. It wasn't done to conform to anything. It was sort of emotional attitude.

Did your family ever-- I mean, your parents' best friends, then, were Jewish? Did they ever spend any holidays or anything like that with them?

No, they weren't that religious. No.

Oh, OK. I see, OK.

It was a young generation. You never, ever saw in Poland any Jewish holiday, any Seder, any Passover, anything like this. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. I wish I knew more about Jewish tradition. But I had no chance to. People, young people weren't religious.

They were being progressive.

They were progressive.

OK, I understand. OK, so we've established a little bit about your childhood. Did you play with your friends? Or your sister was so much younger, I assume she was just a baby when--

She was a baby.

--most of this started.

I had an aunt. It takes long time.

Yeah, I'm just keeping an eye on it so when I need to switch it.

Don't let people talk. Once people start talking, they can't stop.

That's what we want. That's what I want. I want you to tell. I have five tapes here. If you want to fill them up, go ahead.

Now we talk to enter into. So I had an aunt in Warsaw suburbs, in Podkowa Lesna. It was something like or to place we are living here. And every Sunday-- she wasn't married. She lived with her old, charming father.

I was the only child in the family. And I used to go to visit her from almost every Saturday and Sunday. From Saturday till Sunday evening. And I had friends over there. And we played together.

And of course, I had other friends in the town, too. But it wasn't like American suburban life. If you visiting friends, was a big happening. Because in big city, long distance to go everywhere. So it was always planned event.

I see.

Mostly planned for two days, usually, from Saturday till Sunday. Oh, it was very exciting. And I had some friends in my building, too. They played together. Before the war, there wasn't-- I didn't go downstairs to play in the yard. But I visited my friends in my building. But well, it was such a typical life of a child. Nothing, nothing.

Nothing out of the ordinary?

No.

So would you like to discuss, then, about what happened to your family in 1939, when the war broke out? Well, first thing happened, it was raining like this, with just before the-- like today, night before the war. Maybe two nights earlier. Maybe three nights earlier.

And I was stupid enough to leave a book that I was reading, to leave my book outside. And the rain damaged the book. And the book didn't belong to me, it belonged to my mother's friend daughter. And I was so scared. So I didn't know what to do to hide the book.

But those people didn't let me go without returning that book. I know that they were very strict. So the war broke out, and I was so happy, oh, my. I'm saved, I'm saved. And no school. And no school.

That was good? You liked that?

Ah, it was great, it was fantastic. It was extremely exciting happening. But before that great, fantastic thing happened, some bad things happened before. In August, 1939, last month before the war broke out, my parents went for vacation for a week or two. They left my grandmother, that grandmother that I told you about from Lodz, me, my little daughter, and--

Your little sister.

--my little sister, and some, oh, maid, well, some maid who worked for. But my mother had a younger sister. She lived in France.

My mother always worried about her because she married very young. She didn't finish any school. She was little, she was very unbalanced, emotionally unbalanced. She had a very bad, bad marriage.

And her husband was communist. And they were deported from France to Poland. And my mother's sister, with her small son, Claude, came to stay with us for two weeks, for three weeks.

And part of the time, my parents were out. And this was only one, only time in my life I met my cousin Claude. He came from France. He hated everything Polish.

Looking at them, I had a premonition of what will happen to us. Because they were so poor, so-- they were deportees. They had no work. His close parents had no work. They didn't belong anywhere. Because they didn't belong to France, they didn't belong to Poland.

They were victims of some social forces that we became later on. And they perished in the Holocaust. They were in Lodz ghetto. And they perished.

And they took probably were first to die from hunger because they were not able to work. They were not able to work in normal conditions. Not only in Lodz ghetto, which was terrible place to live in.

And that small child, that Claude, and my aunt, whom I didn't like and I didn't know well. I hardly knew them. Are still with me. Did you see the picture of Mr. Lanzmann from--

Yeah, Shoah.

--Shoah.

Oh, yes.

His name is Claude. And he looks exactly like my cousin Claude. Because they were the same age, the same family, the same-- very similar kind of family, Polish emigres. And it's such a similarity between them. And I can't forget that.

And my grandmother that lived with us in Warsaw during the time, war time, she didn't get any letter from her daughter in Lodz ghetto. And it was sort of constant work and tragedy that killed her.

Yeah. Can I ask you-- what type of awareness did you have of the rise of Nazism in Germany and Austria? Did you have a sense that the danger?

Oh, I have something before my aunt, Helenka, and Claude came to visit us. I had another experience with Nazism. Not with Germans, but Germans. Nazi Germany deported German Jews who were born in Poland--

That's right, right.

--in 1937. And it was sort of obligation, sort of moral obligation of everybody who belonged to the Jewish-- somehow to Jewish community to help them. And my mother took a young girl who was maybe 19, maybe 20, gave her a job of teaching me German sort of like being governess. It wasn't exactly governess, but something like teacher and governess, something in between.

She was boring, stupid, and I didn't want to learn German like that. But she was-- on the other hand, I knew she was so poor, she was so troubled. She didn't feel happy. She was so out of place. So it was bad experience. But I felt that this was my fault.

Did she live in your home with you?

No, she used to come over, well, twice a week or so. But that relation didn't last long. Because it didn't work at all.

Right.

She wasn't born to be teacher, or governess, or anything like this. And she wasn't any companion to me, either. So it didn't work. But I know that that was something always sort of talking about helping those. And I had, in my school-- oh, the school wasn't antisemitic. In my school, there was a girl. Too long?

No.

No?

But a few more minutes and I'll flip it.

There was a girl deported from Austria. Her name was Ingeborga. Her parents didn't speak Polish at all, they spoke German. She was very poor. And during the war, I had a special, special relation with her. But this is the story later that I will tell you later on.

OK.

And it was only two people I knew, two deportees I knew from Germany. I didn't know. We children didn't take Germans seriously. They were something so-- Poland was strong, and prepared for war, and the whole world was supposed to help Poland. No, Germans were something to make fun of. No. I was only 10 and 11.

Do you know, did your parents have a sense of the German racial laws and things like that?

Oh, you are kidding. Of course they did.

Yeah. So I mean, they knew the extreme danger that was posed?

Well, they knew, but somehow people didn't know. There was some blockage in their heads. No, your imagination can't go that far. You have to have some experience to imagine things. If you don't experience things like that, you can't.

They knew that life would be very hard. But there was always hope the war won't break out. There was always hope that Hitler will stop. Well, and this was sort of loyalty. You can't escape from place where the others have to live. You know, and this is something not honorable that my father was-- well, it was sort of romantic generation.

Well, I'm going to flip the tape over.

So he was 40 at that time. He was in peak of his career. He was very well. He had big clientele. He was a very well-known lawyer, hardworking lawyer, very, very clever.

My father says, we have to go back to Warsaw, things are getting dangerous. So he packed all of us into that small car. We left everything that we had at home. It wasn't anything very valuable. And we went back to Warsaw the next day.

My father said to my mother, I love you all, but I love my country more, or something like this. And he kissed us goodbye and went to fight for the country. And he left my mother with two-years-old, and me, and everything, with no money.

Because somehow, people weren't prepared. If he had anything, he didn't have at home. Maybe in bank. Maybe clients were. It was a normal, regular life, like every day. Day like every day from financial point of view.



Right, right.

So the war started this way for almost everybody. With not mentally prepared for the change. So my mother-- and the bombardment started. And there was no food in the stores. The stores were shut closed. And well, every day was worse than the day before. And my sister became ill, sick. And she got a very high fever, and she was dying.

Oh, my.

And she was dying. And well, I don't know how far you want to go into gossips, into small things.

This is fine.

Fine?

Yeah.

And we lived on-- I didn't give you my address. But you don't want any address.

Sure, why don't you tell me? Tell it on the tape.

Well, it was at-- I lived at Kapucynska [POLISH] in the war. It was a very small street with dead end. So the traffic was limited. They were habited mostly by lawyers because the court was very close. Court and hipoteca, I don't know how you-- whatever it is. The place that-- I will check. Can you stop?

Yeah, sure. OK.

And there was a-- can you stop again?

Sure. OK, so you were telling me about--

About that strange street we lived on with historic monuments, with monastery, Kapucyn monastery with big, big garden. So it was very quiet, quiet place. But I don't remember why I told you that. I had some idea. But I forgot. So you can forget what.

But we came back home. And oh, I know. On the first floor of the same building, we lived with our aunt, my father's aunt. She was old lady, was a widow with two daughters. They had no children because she didn't like children. And when my small sister, Kicia-- she had nickname Kicia. Kicia became ill.

And we lived on the third floor. And bombardment became very frequent. We were forbidden to live upstairs. And we couldn't stay in the basement all the time because of sick child.

So we asked that aunt to let us stay with her. She lived on the second floor. And she said no because I don't like children. And sick children is something that I really hate. And I [LAUGHS] she was my father's aunt.

Nice lady.

But before the war, she was extremely nice. She became-- she was very nice as long as everything was planned and organized. She loved guests from 5:00 till 7:00 every Tuesday and that's it. So my mother was absolutely astonished. It was something unbelievable.

So we went down to the first floor to the neighbors, who were very unfriendly. But he couldn't-- he had no guts to say no. So we spent part of the September of 1939, the terrible-- you know what was September of '39 in Poland in Warsaw?

At the beginning of the war.

It was the beginning of the war. It was the bombardment of Warsaw. And we spent partly in the basement, partly in that neighbor's apartment. In the basement, people prayed all the time.

And then I felt the very tension between my mother and my grandmother. She was strongly against accepting and being part of that prayers. She felt it was a time of trial. And she felt that she's Jewish, and she didn't want to stay with those praying people.

And well, after Warsaw came into hands of Germans, my grandmother went back to Lodz. And she was evacuated, deported in very brutal manner.

Not all Jews, but some-- I don't know why my grandmother, maybe all the people were departed from Lodz. Took to small towns. And because she had-- and Jewish-- [POLISH], Judenrat. Do you know the word Judenrat?

Yeah, the Jewish council.

Jewish council used to find place for those deportees. But my grandmother didn't need any place because she had her daughter in Warsaw. She came to us. But when she was in Radom, she had such an experience that is worth telling and worth remembering. Those poor, poor deportees were placed among people by Jewish council. And there were many in one building.

And in the evening, one of a German captain, or lieutenant, or something used to gather them. They stayed there for few days. And he gathered-- the German captain gathered them and wrote Bible to them. And told them that monster and Antichrist will be punished by God. And that something will happen. You know who am I talking in, Antichrist and monster. It was Hitler. And his, well--

His theology.

Yes, that he will be punished. And that everybody has to keep faith, and hope. And he gave them extreme consolation. And he was sort of saint. But he was taken next day. Was some evening he didn't come. And those people asked what happened to them. And they were told that better not to ask because he was.

He was a German officer?

German officer.

I see.

So it was something that doesn't happen very often. And something that shouldn't be forgotten. And so my grandmother came to us, and stayed with us, and went to ghetto with us.

Oh, you were sent to the?

We went to ghetto in October of 1940.

How did that happen? You were deported to the ghetto?

No, because there wasn't deportation, anything like this. The ghetto was built. The place for Jewish population was--

It was marked.

It was marked out. The wall was start to be built. And the deadline was set. We were in trouble because my parents had

beautiful, beautiful apartment, with beautiful furniture, and charming place, and everything. And somehow, they couldn't find anybody to.

Jewish population outside the ghetto had to find place in the ghetto district. And people from Polish population from ghetto used to trade their apartments. So it was very unpleasant time. Because it was time for a very easy, quick bucks, mostly for people who lived in-- Polish people who lived in the ghetto quarters.

And it was a big, big tension, the deadline was very close. And we didn't have place to live. But at last, in last minute, in the court, one of the clerks, court clerks, told my father, there's a judge who lives in ghetto, one of judges who lives in ghetto, and who is in the same situation. He has to go out of ghetto and has no place to live.

He was very unpractical man. So we quickly changed apartments. Traded apartments among ourselves. And we moved into Nowolipie [POLISH].

Did your parents ever consider trying not to go?

It wasn't. They were--

It wasn't possible.

Do you have my parents, my father's?

Yeah.

He looks like absolutely-- he's quintessence of Jewish.

Yeah, yeah.

More than me. I'm Jewish enough, but he looks more than me.

Yeah, I would think so.

And he had too many acquaintances. He was well-known among people. And it was too risky. Absolutely. They didn't take that. It was a chance. They considered it, but they decided not. At the same time, my grandmother-- I had two grandmothers.

Right.

One from Lodz that I told you about. Another, my father's mother. And she lost her mind. She was very seriously mentally ill, very dangerous for her. So dangerous for her. It was something very, very acute. Acute illness. You asked me about family.

Yeah, this is important.

Well, on my father's side, my mother, her mother's family were manufacturers. And her father-- it's too long story to go that far. But he had to quit Poland because as a young boy, 14 years old, in some case, 11 years old, and other, 14 years old.

Because the Russians deported Jewish young boys to make them-- young, strong, healthy boys to make them, to take them to army, and make them something of special guard. Well, I don't even understand it myself. But it was something very dangerous.

And he had to escape at night, go through border. He lived in a border, in a small town at the border with Austria. And his father got information by policemen that that night there will be hunting for Jewish boys.

And that same-- in 15 minutes, he left home with few rubles, whatever he had, they had at home. And he went through the border. And he started his independent life. And he worked for farmers. At last, he worked in the manufacture of ribbons.

And when he grew up, at the age of 20 and something, he returned home. But he didn't speak Polish. And I don't know about his Jewish. But he spoke only German that time. So my grandmother's family was bilingual. They spoke German at home.

And my grandmother was very, very, very fluent in German. And being so sick and out of mind, she used to open the windows and start very, very convincing speeches to German people to get rid of Hitler.

Oh, my god.

It was very dangerous. It was very dangerous. So my parents need get to wire windows. And she had to be under constant supervision. But she didn't trust anybody except me. So I stayed with her day and night.

Was she dangerous?

She was dangerous, she was dangerous.

I mean, physically dangerous.

Physically dangerous. She had hallucinations. and when something came into her mind, she was dangerous because she believed that. Like seriously mentally ill people. It happened very sudden after the whole-- because my father went for war. And there was no information on what happened to him for a long time. And my grandmother pledged not to eat until he comes back.

And I don't know if she was sick then or she became sick because of emotions and of her pain. So we stayed with grandmother. We had to keep her separate from the world.

And at last, we had to put her into a hospital because the place we got in ghetto, we divided with another relatives, another family of five people. So we had no room to keep grandmother safely. So she went to hospital, in Sofiowka. It was in suburbs of Warsaw, Jewish hospital for mentally ill. Before that hospital was--

Liquidated?

--liquidated, she took away her life. So she died in December of 1940. And well, we went to ghetto.

The first year of war was still a normal life for me. I used to go to underground. No, it wasn't even underground. To school. Because children in that time were-- well, there was no statute to forbid children, Jewish children, to go to school. So I used to go to regular school.

And from 1940, from the summer of 1940, the real war life started to me because everything changed. First with illness of my grandmother. Later in ghetto, everything was completely different.

And well, in the ghetto, when it came to ghetto, we started our-- started meeting people from over there. And we learned that that judge who we traded apartments was a special person.

And his family was very, very unusual. They were owners of the possession of the land. Owners of the buildings. And they were owners of the lumber that was behind the building. It was very, very unusual. It's important to part of my story.

OK.

So we moved Nowolipie [POLISH]. Around, we have regular buildings, three, four-story buildings, like in a crowded city street. But our building was completely different. We had three courts, very long three courts.

It was very old part of a farm, of plantation that existed in Warsaw few hundred years ago. The people who-- the owners were owners of plantation, they had plantation in the eastern part of Poland.

But they lost everything because of revolution. Sorry, they return. Russian revolution in 1917. They returned to Warsaw, and they treated the place they lived like their plantation. They took care of people who lived there.

Oh, really?

They didn't expect to be paid for rent because they treated them like--

Serfs?

No, they didn't expect any work. But they had the mentality of people of plantation in the best sense of that word. That you take care, they are your people, you take care of them. They taught them, they give them help if they need you. If they need medication, the mistress is there, too. They were absolutely crazy people.

It sounds like it.

They lived in poverty. The apartment was never painted, never nothing was repaired for probably, oh, more than years. There was plenty of space, but on the right side of those courts were sort of buildings, two, three-story buildings.

Very primitive, but buildings. On the left side was sort of barracks, like in the country. The poor country dwellings. So keep it in mind because this is important. And lumber factory in the back.

So when my father learned who the place belonged to saint people who took care of all poor, terribly poor, Jewish, the poorest of the poor who lived in the building. It was sort of obligation, sort of challenge for us.

So in the same apartment with us lived our-- moved into the same apartment, moved our family two doctors, my father, two doctors. And my father organized sort of community association, you can say it. It wasn't association.

But he was so convincing that everybody tried to take care in improving our life in our building. So he built some grass, some places to play for children. He organized kitchen soup?

Soup kitchens.

Soup kitchen. Soup kitchen for poor people. There was one prostitute who lived in the attic of-- because it wasn't a building, it was something like rural, like rural house.

So the prostitute came once. I remember, she said, I earn money very easily. So I can money easily, too. But I can't help people to feed them. Because I work at my apartment. This is my place of work. So I will give money, whatever you need. But I can't take people for dinners.

Because people felt sort of obligation. And my father gave initiative, too, that everybody has to give once a week dinner for at least one person. And give money if they can do it.

And I taught children, two girls. I taught program of third class. Well, I was then in high school, I should be in high school. So I taught them some, gave them some elementary program teaching.

And we became very, very, very friendly, with very, very close to those people in our building. Well, you can tell, in our neighborhood. In our area. So we had books, so some young people used to come over to borrow books. And doctors

used to give medical help to people who lived in those barracks.

About how many people what was this altogether?

I tried to figure it out, but it's impossible. There were at least two, two parts of one, three maybe. Maybe 12. Maybe 12 apartments, 12 regular apartments. Middle-sized, three, four rooms. And probably 10 small apartments, one room, one kitchen in the barracks for 10 families. And maybe one or two small stores. But people were crowded.

Oh, yeah.

So there were many, many people.

It was probably a couple hundred people or so.

Probably couple of hundred people but not that many apartments. And one of those girls that I taught, her name was Faiga. But I didn't feel Jewish. My mission was keep those kids Polish. So I didn't know German. I didn't. So one of the girls promised to teach me German. Because some people didn't speak Polish.

Right, oh, they spoke Yiddish.

They speak Yiddish because they were very, very poor, poor Jewish population of uneducated Jewish population. Some [NON-ENGLISH]. Oh, I remember that but I don't know the name. Let me check.

They discussed politics and everything in Yiddish. And they were different type of people than I knew before because they were real Jewish population, Jewish proletarian. And we were very, very close friends. Especially with that girl, Faiga.

Tinsmith workshop. Tinsmith. We don't-- it's a tinsmith, tinman. Zinc. I don't know what they-- oh, they probably fixed parts, something like this. This kind of people.

So not a full-fledged tinsmith.

No, no. They were extremely poor, extremely smelly, extremely-- and they were always hungry, I know. I remember that my student, my pupil Faiga, how hungry she was, how thin she was, how pale.

How did you manage to get food in the Warsaw ghetto?

Oh, how it was. If you had the money, it wasn't hard to get food. And my mother was a businesswoman.

Right. So she managed to.

She managed. And well, she didn't have any other ambition. She didn't have ambition to gather money, she had ambition to buy food and let people work. And help some people with feeding them. So we had three meals daily.

Wow.

And not everybody was hungry in ghetto. There were people who were very rich in ghetto, too. So we had three meals. And we had always two, three, four people who were regular boarders. Two uncles of my mother.

And well, I don't remember all of them because it changed. But we had always 12 people for every meal. And most of them were regular boarders. They didn't live with us, but they used to eat with us. It was sort of, well, sort of help because it was fixed. And they could trust.

They could rely on it.

They could rely. But there were tragic situations. Behind every jolly and cheerful meal that we tried to keep, there was always tragedy. One of my mother's uncles had grown up son who was mentally ill and not able to work and to do anything. And my uncle had a girlfriend. Not a wife, but sort of wife. She was, we call it common law.

Common law.

And she didn't come over for meals to us. I don't know. It was impossible to feed everything, just impossible. So it was a very, very unpleasant situation of making choices.

And it was the very bad part because my grandmother had bad feelings. Give this, give him for Vera. Vera was that common law wife. Give some well food for Julek, his son. So whoever used to eat at our table had many people who should be fed, too.

And it was absolutely-- it was absolutely impossible. It was always a choice of every day that one day, you could give them, another day you couldn't. It wasn't pleasant. It wasn't pleasant situation. It wasn't pleasant situation even for my mother's uncle. Because he wasn't hungry. And I don't know. But the art of life, of living, in those days was not to talk about everything. To avoid negative talking.

What type of goods were available, though? I mean, you said food was available.

Of course, it wasn't any problem if you had money. There was a big market. The problem was to get food in the nearest close, nearest store. We had a very small store in our home or maybe in the neighboring house.

But the problem was, the art, the challenge was to buy a loaf of bread and take it home. Because the moment, very moment you left the store, the buggers, the hungry people, tried to--

Take it away.

--take it away. And they did. Most of the time, they did.

I assume that you did go out of this little enclave during your time in the ghetto. Do you want to discuss any of the things that you might have seen, anything that you witnessed while you were there?

In the ghetto?

Yeah.

Well, I want to tell about two things. One about Faiga. I called her Frania, but she accepted it. I felt Polish and I tried to-- well, I didn't understand the Jewish-Polish problems in those days. So eventually, because her uncle was so poor, eventually she had been taken to Korczak's orphanage.

And I was over there and visited her. And I didn't-- it was the most remembered by me experience, very touching thing to do. I don't know. I don't use the right word. But something very inspiring going to Korczak's orphanage and taking.

Well, his work was.

It was absolutely-- it was the place for like well, how do you call the place where Eve and--

Oh, the Garden of Eden.

Garden of Eden, Garden of Eden. So it was the last time I saw my Faiga, it was only in that orphanage.

And another thing I wanted to tell you, it was the girl from Austria. The girls from Austria somehow lost her parents

during the ghetto. She was my classmate before the war. Her name was Ingeborga.

And we, her friends, few friends who lived in ghetto, tried to help her by making cigarettes, and selling cigarettes, and giving money to her. But any time I saw her, she was more like a ghost, not like a living person. She didn't look like a living person. She went through typhus. She went through hunger.

It was in ghetto, it wasn't in a camp. But there were places in ghetto that people lived like-- she looked like skeleton. And had her mind, her mind was almost gone in there. And all, but otherwise, there were some people who lived a regular life, more or less.

I want to change tapes if that's OK for you.

OK.