

OK, the date is April 1, 1992, and we're speaking with Dr. Janina Prot in Lexington, Massachusetts. Dr. Prot, could you please tell me your name, and your date of birth, and your place of birth?

Yes. Please, don't call me Dr. Prot. My name is Jana. It is my nickname. And my full name is Janina. And my last name is Prot. Oh, date of birth.

Yes. February 8, '26. I was born in Poland, in small town named Nowe Miasto, near Warsaw.

Could you tell me about your childhood? What was it like growing up in your town? What was your family like? Did you have brothers and sisters? What did you like to do? Anything you can remember about that time.

Well, I can remember plenty. I grew up mostly in Warsaw. But my travels-- during my childhood, I changed the place of living, mostly because my parents were divorced. And part of my childhood, I spent with my father and then part with my mother. I have a brother, who is two year. See I mean?

That's OK.

Two year younger. And for part time before the war, we were separated because he was with my mother, I was with my father. It was plenty of family problems. My father had some kind of high position in Poland.

What did he do? He was a director of a big factory of ammunition and explosive materials in Poland. So it was kind of high position. And living with him, I was living near Radom, a small town, Pionki, what was mostly the town around big factory. It was a big house, big garden. I didn't go to school.

You didn't?

No, because it was small country-like elementary school. And my father didn't want to send me to this country school, feeling probably correctly that education was not too good. So I was taught at home with two other girls. We had a private tutor. And we had lessons at home. And in the afternoon, I had to do my homework, as all children.

And once a year, I had to take some small exam. It was a government requirement that I have enough education to start another class. This way, I practically never went to school. Except last year before the war, when we moved to Warsaw. And I started what they call in Poland Gymnasium, what is about junior high. This level. And I went for one year to school.

Could you tell me a little bit about the religious life in your home or respective homes with your parents?

Well, it is really complicated. We start some kind of complicated part of my life. My parents converted to Catholicism before I was born. Both my family were completely what they call assimilated Polish family. They never feel that have too much to do with Jewish habits.

My father, I think, it was biggest Polish patriot what I ever met in my life. And I think almost everybody on my father's side, in some '20s probably, or after the First War, converted to Catholicism or to Protestantism. Not in my mother family. My mother was, I think, only one.

So I grew up as a Catholic girl. Of course, my parents were not very religious in any religion, simply. But officially, they were Catholic. And because I grew up with other children, they wanted me, probably, to be the same as the other girls. So I was baptized and I went to first communion, having, I don't think-- being eight-year-old.

And I didn't know that I am Jewish. We never talk about it at home. I knew that we are a little different. And it was hard for me to figure out what is really different. I knew that we are different than the other people.

Of course, my parents never was going to the church. But if I wanted to go to the church as other girls, or if I wanted to

go to the church with our maid, it was permitted. It was fine. I really discovered who am I when the war started and we all discovered that we are not Pole anymore, that we are Jews and treated as Jews by everybody around.

But otherwise, people didn't know? Or they did know?

Oh, yes, of course everybody knew. But it was some kind of thing what we were-- educated people don't talk about. We were living between some kind of educated, intellectual people. And many of them, they have what they call in Poland mixed marriages. One of them was Jewish, one of them was Polish, and everybody had some grandmother was Jewish. You know, just mixed.

And until probably late '30s, I don't know if my father really feel a big antisemitism. I think later, something started because I remember then, about '38 or beginning of '39, he started to talk that he would like to quit his job, what was very well-paid. And I think he enjoyed doing what he was doing. Could probably move to Warsaw. And so on, and so on.

It was probably some-- I will never know this because I didn't see my father after the war practically started. So I never was-- I never had opportunity to ask him. I was a child.

And personally, I was living in some kind of isolated area. I didn't go to school. I was living with my father at this time, being taught at home with other girls. It was practically not possible even to be exposed to the Polish antisemitism. I knew that it did exist. I knew that it is something really bad. But I never took it personally.

Right, well, you had no reason to.

I grew up in very liberal house, very intellectual liberal house. And it was bad to be antisemitic. It was bad to think that black people are different, and all people should be equal. And so on, and so on. You can imagine how it is.

I also imagine you didn't have any black people, too.

No, no, no. But also it was this kind of feeling in the house, that the people equal, all religions are fine.

Right. Can I ask you about your childhood? Do you remember, did you have any particular interests, or hobbies, or music, or anything that you pursued or enjoyed to do?

I don't think so. I was very unhappy child. In all this financial possibility till then, I was very unhappy. I was very unhappy because my parents were divorced.

How old were you when they divorced?

I was about four year old.

And they were constantly fighting to have children. My father wanted to have both of us. And my mother, of course, wanted to have both of us. And we are constantly from different reasons switched from one parent to the other. And you know, my mother was very nervous, tense, anxious, neurotic person.

I was much, much more happy to be with my father. But my mother, when I went with her for vacation, was constantly telling me, how come that you are with your father? You should be with your mother. You are a girl. And children should stay with mother. And so on, and so on.

I was really very, very shy, unhappy, frustrated, frustrated child. I was very good student. And I was reading books from age five. I had time that I was reading two books per day.

And I know and understand now why everybody was looking, oh, what a wonderful child, reading, and reading, and reading. No, it was my escape, simply. Not to be exposed on this family problem, not to play with children, what they

can ask me, where is your mother? I had very strong feeling that I am different, and I should keep away. I was very happy.

Even now-- this is up through your teenagerhood?

No, teenager I was during the war. I was also unhappy, but different way.

OK.

The war started when I was 13. And just before the war, I moved to Warsaw. My father stayed, and I moved with my brother to my mother's apartment. And we stayed with her.

Can you tell me when you found out you were Jewish?

I remember. It was very funny. I remember one talk with our maid. I was probably 17 year old. And I wanted to go with her to the church. And my grandmother, paternal grandmother, she was living with us when I was with my father. And I really didn't like her. She was very Victorian, very rigid, and stiff. And constantly trying to correct my behavior.

And I remember telling my maid, I know why she does not want me to go to the church, because she is Jewish. And I remember my maid was looking around, you know, and didn't probably know what to say on this. So I knew that something was around.

I cannot clearly tell you what I find out. Probably, I was about 12. But was still, I think, what the people don't talk about it. It was full denial. It was full denial. And of course, immediately after war, we find out. We all find out that you are nothing more, nothing more, nothing less. But you're Jews.

Oh, after the war, you found out.

When the war started.

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, OK. OK.

Of course, when the war started.

Right. So would you like to talk about that a little? Where were you, and what was going on, and what did you end up doing?

OK, war started, as you know, September 1, '39. I came from vacation. It was last vacation was I spent with my father. To Warsaw. And the war started. And we moved from our apartment, which was on the north part in Warsaw, in Bielany, to the huge apartment of my aunt. It was a sister of my father.

Because for a reason what I was never able to understand, everybody had the feeling that it is more safe to be in downtown Warsaw than all around. Of course, life showed that it was completely different. And then it was-- how is siege in English?

Siege.

Siege. Thank you.

Same word.

Yeah. Of the Warsaw. And we stay all time until in the apartment of my aunt, with her husband and her daughter, which was 10 years older at this time. It was also her daughter-in-law because the son, my cousin, was in the army. Was an officer in the army.

But his wife was in this big apartment. And three months old child. It was seven, or eight room, enormous apartment in downtown Warsaw.

And September 25, it was the worst bombardment of Warsaw. And it was one of the first bomb dropped on this house. My cousin was killed on the place. A wife of my cousin and three-month-old baby was killed. And her mother was killed. Four people was killed, being about, I don't know, five yards from me.

Simply, this house collapsed. And I was on the verge of the collapsed house. And we survived. My aunt survived, her husband, my mother, my brother, and myself.

And then the first phase of war finished. Warsaw give up, as you know. It was September 29 or 30. And we moved back to our apartment on the north part of Warsaw, what was not too badly destroyed. It was no glass, no windows. But otherwise, it was the same as before.

And then we discovered that first of all, we don't have any money. My father disappeared. We knew that he's in the army. We didn't know was he killed or what's happened.

And also, I don't know how it was, but I think my mother had the feeling that it is pressure against Jews, and we cannot stay too long. I think in October, probably, or November '39, it was the order that the Jews had put the bands with Zion star-- David Star.

Star of David, yeah. With Star of David, star of the David. Of course, we didn't because we lived in complete denial, that we are not. We are not, we are not. But we knew about it. And I think that the landlord, the owner of the house what we are living, he probably knew. Well, people know these kind of things.

So we're hanging around, not having too much money, able to buy bread and not too much until in November, my father show up from the army. But he knew very well that he cannot stay for all possible reason.

And he started, immediately tried to go through the green border, what they call-- illegally to Hungary. And jumping a little farther, he went to Hungary in end of December '39. And from Hungary to France, and from France to England, and I never saw him again.

So last time when I saw him, it was a brief time in December or November '39. And we decided to move near Warsaw to the big some kind of convent what was near Warsaw. And my mother had good friends in this area.

Could you tell me a little bit about this convent?

It was some interesting place the convent was sister of Franciskanki, Franciscan?

Franciscan.

Franciscan sister. It was organized by mother Czacka. She was one from the Polish very well-known aristocratic name. And they were quite liberal from the beginning. And plenty of people from Polish aristocracy, from intellect. They some kind of stick to this convent. And it was what they call French Catholicism.

They were running school from blind children, they were mostly interested in blind children. And mother Czacka, she was blind herself, the mother superior, she was blind. Some way, Jewish intellectual was also interested in this convent. It was planned to be very friendly with them. And two of the nuns on higher position were of Jewish origin. They converted and they became nuns.

My mother knew some of them before the war, was very friendly with them. And with all the situation, they invited us to stay over there, telling that they can give us some-- not so much apartment, some room, simply. And my mother can help in the garden, what she loved to do it. And I can go to the school or whatever.

I don't think that we had very clear plan what we will be doing. Everybody hoped at this time that the war would finish in one year. So what, survive one year and that's all. Nobody expected what really happened.

So in the very end of 1939, we pack our belongings, we take very few of our furniture, some basic things only, and we moved to Laski, which was 10 kilometers north from Warsaw. And we stayed in small apartment. My mother was working helping in the garden, or sometimes in the kitchen, whatever was needed. My brother stayed mostly home.

And for the first year, I was simply helping. I remember working also in the kitchen, and working in washroom. And doing everything what it should be done. I remember clearly. I was, at this time, 13, 14.

I was bored to death. It was nothing to read, it was nothing to do, it was no people in my age. I was not allowed to go, of course, to Warsaw or any other place.

I probably-- here is a good place to mention that I didn't look as a Polish girl. I had very black hair, black eyes, rather dark skin. And from obvious reason, it was difficult for me to walk on Warsaw street not being asked by people, are you Jewish? Or hey, stop, you're Jew, and so on.

My brother didn't look as a Polish child, too, with curly black hair. But he was not circumcised. And this way, some way, my mother knew that it was easier to save him than to save me.

My mother, if we are talking about how they look, looked wonderful. She absolutely didn't look Jewish. Nobody never suspect that she can be Jewish, a very kind of small, very pretty face, with gray. At the time, completely gray hair. We have gray hair early in the family. And she did not have any problem when she was walking around, and never had any difficulties.

Of course, we had always also difficulty with our documents. We keep our name Prot because does not have any Polish, Jewish, or any other meaning. But my mother's maiden name is Dajches. She was Zosia Dajches. Dajches, it is not the name what you can have in documents during the war.

So all our documents were changed. And my mother's maiden name was given Kossuth, what is a typical Hungarian name. And it was given in this goal that if somebody was asking me during the war, oh, you look some fine strange, well, probably you look Jewish, you have so hard, so black hair. I was telling immediately, oh, yes, oh, well, I have a black hair because my grandmother were Hungarian, you know. My mother is Kossuth, my mother's name is Kossuth.

And the documents were changed with the help of these nuns and this when we stayed. And I think it was very good documents. My baptism document, baptisal document? It was fill out in some kind of church in the books.

So it was possible to check that it is not a false, that is true, and you know, some church was-- some priests were able to do this if they wanted to false the book. Make them before the war, and so on. So we had not too bad documents for the war. And we are walking around. So you would like to know what's happened to me later, yeah?

Yeah, if you just want to give the straight narrative of you're in the convent and then?

Then I am in the convent and it was about 1940, we moved. All of this year, we stayed together. It was very hard, it was very poor, it was not enough food. We did not have enough clothes. But we are quite, we feel quite safe. In 1940, it was start feeling that the war will not finish so quickly and it is not so easy.

And I started to press my mother very badly that I would like to go back to school. And I begged her that I want to go back to Warsaw. And I want to go to school and to my Gymnasium. And that is not possible for me to lose so much time.

So first at all, my mother had friends in Warsaw. And they agreed to take me and to stay with their children. And I would be able to live with them and simply to go to school. And I move with them.

I don't know. I am sure they knew who am I. I am quite sure. But we, of course, never talk about it. It was some kind of agreement that it is complete denial. They don't know that I am Jewish. I have all my documents. I am a Polish girl, with Polish name, I am Catholic.

It was very helpful that I knew Catholic religion very well. And of course, to tell all prayers?

Prayers.

It was no problem for me. And I knew all the habits, that I can go to the church, and knew how to behave during a mass, and so on, and so on, and so on. It was big help, of course.

So I started to go to school. I went to school. And it was very difficult for first year. And then the next year, how it was? Then it was about '41. I stayed with these friends for about half a year. And then I was quite unhappy with them. The children were impossible, it was very cold, it was dirty, and I was hungry all the time.

And my mother decided that I am big enough-- I was about 14, 15-- that I can live alone. So they rent me, not a room, because nobody did have money for a room. But also through some friends, they find an older woman which wanted to have some kind of company. And she rent me a bed in her room.

It was in Zoliborz. It was much more close to my school. And I stay with her. I'm sure it was her. She was some kind of nice woman. And I was going to school. Only I remembered that I had to cook for myself. I had to feed myself.

And it was absolutely nothing to eat. I was awful, terribly hungry all day long. I had only this bread, what was [POLISH], what was permitted to buy. And of course, you can buy many thing in Warsaw during a war on the black market. But I didn't have any money.

So for dinner, I cook some kind of kasza. And I eat every day the same, piece of bread for breakfast, and this kasza what I cook with water for myself. And I did this in the afternoon. And I remember being very, very, very hungry. At this time, I have to move back a little bit. Because ghetto was organized, of course, much earlier.

But I was going to ask you, yeah.

Yeah, ghetto was organized much earlier. But the ghetto was more south from the part of town what I was living. And I avoid very much going to the downtown. Doesn't mean I was living in north part of the Warsaw, Bielany, and later in Zoliborz. School was in Zoliborz.

And I practically never go downtown because it was very, very unsafe. But few times when I went, I saw the wall of the ghetto. And the streetcar was going-- for some times was going through ghetto. Because it was a big ghetto and a small ghetto. Probably the people told you. I don't.

Yeah, I know about it.

Yeah. And the car, streetcar was going for sometimes through ghetto, not stopping, of course. And I remember, one my trip through the ghetto, it was probably in '42, I took streetcar, I don't know why.

And then it was possible to see street on the ghetto through windows. And then I saw dead people lying on the street, this I remember, and dead probably children bodies, covered with newspaper. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to look, or not to look, or what to do. This I remember very, very clearly.

Did people talk about-- when the streetcar went through the thing, did anyone make any? No one said a word?

No, nobody said any words. People, I think, try not to look.

Yeah. Now, were the windows. I mean, I've heard things that the windows were like blocked.

The windows were locked in some towns. And if you see a movie Europa, Europa, I'm sure you did, he's looking for some kind of scratch. If I remember correctly, the windows were not blocked in this streetcar what I took.

And shortly after this, it was some change in the relationship between big ghetto and small ghetto. I think small ghetto was liquidated. And the streetcar was not going anymore through ghetto. Only along the walls what we see the big opening, [POLISH], port, port, [POLISH], entrance. Entrance to the ghetto with Polish and German police. And the people.

At this time, sometimes, you were able to see Jews on the street going to do some work on the street. Pavement of the street or something. Going men. And with, of course, German soldiers and police with guns, and so on. Sometimes we saw the small group of Jews out of the ghetto. I think it was about at this time.

Also, oh, this is probably in '41. I was in ghetto, inside of the ghetto once during the war. Should I tell you the story what's happened?

Yes, please, yes.

I went with some other children of my friends. Well, they're half Jewish. And they didn't look too Polish, too. We are very stupid. And we tried to change streetcar near the ghetto wall, what was the most always dangerous place.

Because plenty of the people what we call in Poland during the war, [POLISH]. You know the word [POLISH]? Informers. The people where they pick up the people on the street, and they, oh, you are a Jew, give us money. If not, we are going to the police.

And we stop over there on the street, what was very bad place. And of course, immediately, they pick us. They went with us. We are all teenagers. Two of them. I was with the other girl. She was a little older. I was about 14, and she was, I think, 16.

And they took us to the police station on the entrance to the ghetto. And inside to some ghetto, some kind of, I remember, big room. And they started to ask us for documents, and what we are doing, we are Jews, and how come that we are out of the ghetto?

And we are sitting and both or I was telling constantly, we are not. We are absolutely not. It is a mistake. Please let us go, it is a mistake. I don't know how I have, and the other girl, too, how we have nerve to tell.

Because in some moment, it was some-- this I remember very clearly-- some older man, a Jew, with band on the arm, and he came to me, and he told me, [POLISH], mademoiselle, why you don't have a band?

So I said, I'm not Jewish. There's no reason for me to have a band. Oh, how come? You are Jewish. It's enough to look at you. It's enough to look at you. You are Jewish. And I don't understand. But if you will give me some money, I can help you. I can help you. Do you have parents? I can call them. I can help you if you will give me some money.

It was clearly that he was working with the police. And I looked at him, and I told very firmly, I am not Jewish, and please go away and leave me alone. And then the police. And he went alone, he went away.

And then the police, the Polish policeman came and asked me again about documents. What I did not have enough. Because I don't have yet Kennkarte. Kennkarte was given when you were 16.

But for some kind of-- I had to have something. I have a small document, Legitymacja, small piece of paper, from school what I was attend one year before the war. And it was Catholic school because I was going to Catholic school one year before the war.

And I show him this. And I told him, do you think if I will be Jewish before the war, I will be going to Catholic school? And he look at us, and he lets us go. So it is only once that I was inside the ghetto. And he pushed us through the entrance. And we took the streetcar. And since then, I knew very well that I have to keep far away from this place.

So going back, I was going, it was '42, yes. I was going to school and living with this woman. And I started to have problem at this time. I think the woman didn't know what I am. But I remember that few times, they picked me on the street.

And these Polish informers, they told me, oh, you are Jewish, go with us. And mostly, I tried to tell very firmly, no, I am not, go away, and so on. Because I knew if once if I will tell that yes, or I will give them some money, or I don't know what, that will be the end.

And some people, they are calling me Jewish. And some people, even in school, they ask me, some girl, they ask me, oh, look, you look so Jewish. And I always tell this story, oh, well, I have black hair because I am Hungarian.

But it was-- I don't know how to tell you. It started to be as I am totally, completely, day and night, 24 hours on this scene. That I am playing somebody who I am not.

Even, you know, in this situation, somebody pick you up on the street, mostly the Jewish people became very confused, you can see on their face that, oh, my god. I learned not to have on my face. I learned when they pick me up to smile and say, hey, you know, no, how funny.

But I remember, psychologically, I was somewhat exhausted. It was this deny and deny, and it was nobody with whom I can talk about it. Absolutely nobody. Because even it was some friends what I see sometimes. And I knew that they know. It was some taboo. Never, never talk about it. Never admit that they know. Never talk about this problem.

To make things even more funny, time to time, my mother visited to me. We never talk about it. It was denial between my mother and myself. It was something what we never, never talk about it. My mother always, always told me, you remember, you are Hungarian. And I knew why she was telling. But it was never to this extent that I was able to say, well, talk about it. Talk what's happened to the rest of the family, you know. Never, never.

To make things more complicated, at this time, my mother had to move from this convent when she stayed with my brother. I think it was '42. And one day, they told her that there are some informers telling the police that she's Jewish and my brother is a Jew.

And they told them that if they will not go away in few hours, they will be taken. And that will be the end. So my mother took my brother, leaving absolutely everything behind. I think took some clothes with her and as much money as they had. Not too much, of course. And went by [FRENCH]?

Foot.

By foot. And went by foot to Warsaw. And then I know from her story that she didn't have any place to go. She was walking on the street in Warsaw keeping by hand this small, very Jewish-looking boy. And she didn't have any place to go. And at 7:00, it was curfew hours. And it was became evening. It was in summer, '42, I think. It was became the evening. And you cannot stay on the street.

So in Warsaw, it was some small hospital also run by nun. It was some private hospital in downtown Boston. And my mother knocked to the door to the small hospital. The nun opened. And she told the nun, this boy is very sick. He has to be in the hospital right now.

So the nun, of course, didn't want to take him. My mother almost forced herself into. And as I told you, my mother looked always very elegant. And told, well, I'm terribly sorry, dear nun, but he has appendicitis. He has to be operated.

Oh, god.



Yeah. And he has to go to bed right now. So the nun did know what to do, opened the door, and put my brother to the hospital to the bed. And the next day, I don't remember. Of course, I don't if the doctor was seeing him or not. But my mother left him with the nuns as a very sick child in bed. And ran through Warsaw to find the place what they can took him. And after some effort, I think some friends took him for a few days.

And then he was placed for the children of Polish officers, what they perished during the war or something. It was special organization helping these kind of children, named RGO, RGO, Rada Główna Opiekuncza. And they had some small houses, what they're taking abandoned or children what they didn't have father. And my brother went to this kind of orphanage.

OK. Yeah, it's fine.

So at this time, my mother-- what was going with our family? My brother was in this orphanage. My mother took a job as a helper of some sick woman with children, something as a tutor for children, or a little bit maid, or something, and living with these people.

And I was going to school and living with this old woman, who would quickly, after this started, also to be impossible. I think somebody informed. She told me that I cannot stay with her any longer. Not giving me a clear reason for this. Or if you want to have some small story before I will tell what I was doing before.

Sure.

During this time, I think it was '42, some children from ghetto was going through streets of Warsaw and begging for bread. You can see them on the street running and completely in schmattas, very hungry, mostly was completely without hair. How do you call?

Bald.

Yeah, but they cut the hair.

Oh, right, shaven. Oh, my.

Yeah. And they had some kind of cans. And they bang on these cans, metal cans, making noise. And some people, not all the people, are throwing food to these cans. They are mostly sitting on the people. They are half-naked, even in winter. Completely, you know, what they call, dying from hunger. Looking as a people, you know, dying from hunger. Children from Kenya, you see how. You know how does it look.

And some people there are putting some piece of bread or a piece of potato. And the Germans when they see them, they shoot them, simply, on the street. So in this apartment building what I was living was this woman, she was going to work, and I was back from school, about 3:00 in the afternoon.

It was a child, probably, sleeping on the stairs or someplace with this big, noisy can. And he was banging this can, asking the people to throw him some food. And I throw some food, some dry bread, to this can. And he remember what I did.

And next day, he showed again. And what it was worse, it was on the first floor. He showed on my door. And banging on this can. And you know, it was very dangerous. I don't know if you can understand, in my situation, how terribly dangerous it was to have a Jewish child on the door.

So I opened the door and I throw again some bread because I really didn't know what to do. And I was dying that the neighbors will look. And then it will be all situation completely, you know. I was going on the edge of the-- and then he came again. And then I think he came again.

But what I wanted to say-- the fear of the poor child, I never had this kind of fear. I was sitting, and how, at home and almost praying God, please, don't send this child anymore because I don't know what to do. Open the door or not open the door. So this was the situation. Yes or not?

Yeah, I'm gonna flip it over now. OK. OK. It's on.

It's on. So I at this time, really, I think they didn't know what to do with me. Summer started and my mother and her friends, they find some friends near Lowicz. It was a school for agriculture from the peasant girls. And they sent me over there for vacation, that I can help but work in fields, and work between these girls. And they agreed to take me. This means I will have a bed and food. And then I can work.

And I went there, knowing that I don't have any place to go. And nobody does not want to take me. And I started to work. And I was terribly unhappy. But I was very unhappy all times, that it nothing, nothing that was new.

And I was only one girl with dark hair between these Polish peasants, very simple girls. Sleeping in the big room for more than 20 beds. I had one bed between them and working in the field, and taking care about cows, and garden, and weeds, taking out weeds. And oh, I learned a lot.

I have to tell. And the girls never crossed their mind that I can be Jewish. It was so, they were so simple. And it was so far about their imagination, even, that I was going with them to the church. And they were surprised. They were surprised that I have different hobbies and different clothes. And they asked me thousands of naive question. And of course, I was reading books constantly. And they asked me what for I am reading books?

Where did you get books at this time?

They have some small library. It was very boring, and I knew almost everything. But you know, I still was reading in the evenings.

I think the director of the school, he probably knew very well who am I. But they place everybody around. They played that they don't know. It was some kind of general agreement. And I had my documents. And at this time, I had Kennkarte, what you can see, and it was general agreement that I am not Jewish.

And I stayed there quite a long time. I didn't go back to Warsaw. I didn't go back to school. It was not possible. And I was working. I was very exhausted, very lonely. It was absolutely nobody to talk. I was still only 16. And I got hepatitis.

Oh, god.

I was very sick. Of course, I was not seen by any physician. I was lying in bed, I remember, with was high fever. And I was as yellow as lemon. And after hepatitis, what I understand now, but at this time, I had very deep depression. I was unable to do anything physically and mentally. I was sitting in the corner in the room. And even I was unable to read. I was staring by window. And I didn't want anybody to talk to me. And I didn't want to answer.

And it was for about three or four weeks. And everybody was surprised, what is going on? They think that I am going crazy, simply. So after this time, I went back to work. I was very weak. And everybody was laughing that I cannot work too much. They told me that I am lazy.

Believe me, I was not lazy. I was sick. I was sick. But I was dragging my foot. One of the girl in school got typhoid fever. And they decided that I was the best person to take care of her. So they put us together in the small room. And I was taking care of her.

I had always some kind of nurse's possibility. I was interested in medicine. And I was taking care of her until she was so sick that they took her in the hospital. And she died, as I know. At this time, it was December '42. Yeah, it was December.

You didn't get typhoid? You didn't catch? Typhoid?

No, no. I was very-- hepatitis was enough for me. And I remember, in December, I was still not very healthy. And I went to bring water from the well. And it was very windy day. I had long hair, what mostly I combed very nicely back, and put them together.

But it was early in the morning. I went for water. And my hair, I think, were down, and it was windy. And my hair was, I don't know, waving or whatever. You tell. And I was taking water. And the Germans came to the school for something. They were coming frequently. I avoid. You know, I was always hiding in some place when I saw that the car was coming.

And just when I was taking this water, the car with German came. And they look at me. And they immediately went to the director of the school. And they asked him what this Jewish girl is doing here. I didn't look too well, probably.

And so he asked me. And still, not telling me directly, he told me, you cannot stay any longer. You have to go. You have to go now. Some way, I don't remember how I informed my mother. I had my mother address. I don't remember. It was possible to call probably, I don't know. My mother came next week and she picked me up.

And it was the end of my stay in this school. I went with her to Warsaw. And I stayed with my very good friends. They were parents of my friend from school, Zofia Kielan, with whom I am still very friendly.

And I was a good friend from school from both sister Zofia and Krystyna. And the parents agreed to take me to their home. It was just the beginning of 1943. And I started again to go to school. I cut through all this what I lost during the last six months. And it was-- as for my all war time, it was probably the best time. I was treated as a third daughter. I think they liked me very much. And I treat them as my parents.

Of course, they knew. And I knew that they know. And so on. We never, never talk about it. It was, again. We never talk about it. I had all my papers. I had documents. I had my Kennkarte. I have big, beautiful picture from my first communion. What of course disappear, I can not show this. It was very important to have it. And I stay with them until May, 1943. Does it mean after ghetto uprising? No.

The time at this time with the Jews was very difficult. It was plenty of informer on the street. It was very difficult to walk. Many times, they stopped me. And many times, I had the feeling that being in the streetcar. And sometimes, I had to go to Warsaw.

I had to pretend that I am a normal person, that I am moving as everybody else. Also what I didn't mention before, but I cannot talk about everything at the same time. I was in Polish underground movements.

Oh.

From age 14, 15, I was involved by my friend Zofia and Krystyna Kielan. And I was what they call in Polish Underground Army, AKA, a youth organization, what was Szare Szeregi. A gray rose. And we had our meetings. And we had some kind of underground activities. What was some way it was a danger.

But for me, it was some kind of protection. I don't know if you understand why. Because the fear for me, unfortunately, I didn't fear the German. I feared Poles. The German was not dangerous for me directly. Of course, indirectly, yes.

But directly, it was the Poles. It was somebody on the street, or ex-friends, or somebody who knew who was my father. What also happened to me during the war, they stopped me because they recognized me. And some neighbors, some concierge, or whatever.

And being in the Polish underground movement, it was some kind of protection. That I belong to a different group, I belong to Polish youth, I am with them, I am in the underground movement.

So we had the meetings what we are going. And we had a small different task. And I remember they gave me, Polish underground gazette, a small newspaper. Small newspaper, it was called Biuletyn Informacyjny in this time.

And all bunch of them, I don't know, 20 or whatever. And they asked me to bring to different houses, to different homes. It was what the young people were doing. I didn't want to take it. I didn't want to take it. Not because-- my danger was my face.

Right.

I didn't want because who knows-- when they picked me up with these underground materials, who knows what I will tell it who will start to beat me up? I had the feeling that I am not dangerous myself but I didn't want to tell them that I don't want to take it. Why everybody's taking, why not?

Of course, it was out of question to tell them what was the most simple, look at me. Do you really want this together with this kind of look to walk on the street with some underground material? So you know, it was constant struggle how to avoid this kind of involvement.

So we're still in '43 and it was Warsaw ghetto uprising. Oh, one more thing, what I think, unfortunately, we have to tell. I was going to school with my friend Zofia, and her mother gave her some small lunch with us, piece of bread we had in the pocket. And we walked.

It was one streetcar, it was not very far away from the home. And again, it was this Jewish child sitting with a can, completely emaciated child with this can, and banging, and half-dead-looking, simply. And we both immediately, without talking, we took this lunch from our pockets and throw away to his can.

And at this moment, some Polish woman noticed from the street and started to run after us, screaming, [POLISH]. Jewish ants, Jewish helper, Jewish, you know. What was very dangerous. Because she was very angry that we gave this piece of bread to this Jewish child. Isn't it difficult to imagine?

Now, OK, let's talk about uprising. Jewish uprising started just before Easter. I think it started first day. And from the place what we are living, it was fifth floor. The window faced to the south. So we can start it to see the flame.

And even it was quiet at night. It was no street movement. You can hear sometimes people screaming. And then of course, smoke. And constant them guns shot. We all try not to go near the ghetto walls. It was very dangerous at this time, what was many time-- what was many time described.

And then I remember, a few days after ghetto uprising started, it was Easter dinner in the house of our friends. What they say, I think they started to have a hard time with me, too. Because all the relative started to tell them, why do you feed-- why do you keep this strange-looking girl? And we are sure that she's Jewish. And so on, and so on.

But it was a big dinner. The relatives of friends were invited. And we are sitting on the table and eating. And the windows are open. And you can see the smoke and the guns. It was something for me what-- it was hard for me to take it. It was some feeling that I am not in the right place. That probably, I should be over there, not here.

And again, some of these people. They basically was not bad people. I remember looking by the window and telling, well-- what I heard many times during the war. Well, good the Germans are doing for us the dirty work. What I hear many, many times during the war. It is a poem of Milosz, what you know for Campo dei Fiori? Do you know Campo dei Fiori? It's a poem about Milosz.

Oh, no I don't know it. I know Campo dei Fiori in Rome.

Want me to tell from the beginning?

Yeah, if you don't mind.

Oh, no. Of course not. So we all as I told avoid to go near the ghetto at this time. But I went once or twice. And I remember on the Plac Krasinski, it was a small, some kind of carnival. It was a carousel and music. And the people are going on the carousel. And it was beautiful weather. And just pure, I don't know, yard.

It was a wall of ghetto. And shooting people, and smoke, and screaming, and so on. And the people are playing. What was described this Milosz poem. And it is not a [POLISH], it was this way what he described.

Then what's happened-- you want to know what's happened to me later?

Yes, please.

Yes, I took my-- I finished school at this time.

Gymnasium?

Yeah, I finish Gymnasium. And we had some kind-- I didn't go into the detail because it does nothing to do with my personal story and my Jewish story. That of course, Gymnasium was not existent during the war. And we had what they call Komplety, which was underground school, with small group. And we are moving from one house to the other.

And the tutors, teachers were coming. And this way, I finished Gymnasium with small groups or other girls. And in May, we had to take Matura, diploma, high school diploma, what was also underground. But it was some kind of celebration. We had to be dressed.

And I remember in somebody's bigger apartment, we had to take our exams, completely legally. And pass my Matura, what I passed. It was in May, '43. And then I finished.

Both my friends went further to underground, teaching to the university, what also was acting during the war in Warsaw. And I decided to go to the school for nurses. At this time, I knew that I wanted to be a physician.

But it was not possible for any point of view, also financially. You know, we did not have any money all the time. And I was living, you know, in houses of friends, or trying to help. And from one house to the other house.

So I decided to go to school for nurses. And it was a very good school in Warsaw. She was run by very elegant woman, Mrs. Romanowska. I remember her. And she decided to take me. Even I was below the age. You had to be 17 to be admitted. And I was below 17. I was 16 and 1/2. And she agreed to take me. And also, they have, how do you call, internal board?

Board to stay there?

Yeah, to stay there.

Room and board

Room and board. We are working in the hospital in the morning. In the afternoon, we had lessons. And it was some-- on the last floor. It was some small rooms, every room for four girls. And we were able to live there and eat very, very poor food. But still, it was something to eat.

So this way, I was all set, I can tell. Because I was able to live there. Also it was some kind of safer because I have this nurse uniform, what you can see here, with some kind of white hat, something.

And I feel that I didn't look so different in this. My hair was fair back, and it was all white, and I was always extremely careful to be extremely clean and in order, no hair out. You see, today, no everything completely flat, very clean hands. You know, it was very important not to look neglected.

Right, right.

Not to look this way. What was also very strange, funny-looking right now, the directrice of the school, I think she knew very well who am I. And I think some probably people called her and asked her to take me.

Because first, she agreed to take me even I was below the age. And second, every new pupil has some kind of task to do in school, for instance, keep the bathroom clean, or keep the corridors clean, or clean the table after breakfast, or this kind. They gave me a chapel. I was in charge of chapel.

What was not so very easy because I had to get up very early, at 5:30 in the morning and clean the chapel, and put the flowers if we had any. And then to help the priest with mass.

And after a mass-- of course, you don't know this because it is completely different now-- the priest was going to give communion to the sick people, what they wanted to have communion. And I was the one going before the priest with a candle and a small [POLISH] making noise, small--

Bell.

--bell, of course, sorry. And a small bell. To the hospital. And stand on there show him and sick people what they wanted to have communion. And it was my task during my stay in nurse's school. I was helping priest in the chapel.

Where was your mother at this time?

My mother was living in had different jobs mostly living with some people they have in troubles. Because I remember, both times, I think, the women were very sick. One woman has a cancer, and it was small children, and she was helping, and it was some similar situation going from one house to the other.

She never had any specific problem as a Jewish woman. We had all problem. We didn't have money, we didn't know how to live, we didn't have any apartment. Now, you are losing this job and staying with one people and you didn't know what place to go.

And my brother stayed in this orphanage. He had some problem because he looked too dark, and too dark hair, and so on. But at this time, I think he knew that he's not circumcised, and he knew that he can prove that he's not Jew. So it was some way. I think the most difficult was my situation.

And then I stay in nursing school until 1944, when it started Warsaw uprising. And because I still was in the Polish underground movement, and I still had some orders from them. I also had some-- we are soldiers. So I had to-- when the Warsaw uprising started, I had to go to my unit. And I was two months on the first line Warsaw uprising. What was also was useful. Because I was after one year of nurse's school.

Right.

That I knew much more and I was in [POLISH], how to tell in English? This small--

Like a clinic kind of?

No, no, no, I was with solider group, big soldier group. It was a small group. Some medical group. Paramedics. Oh, oh, OK. Paramedics group. It was four of us. And I was a chief of paramedics for this group.

Great.

Yeah, great. And I stayed two months, being almost killed many, many times. But at this time, I was no different from the other people, you know, practically my being a Jew, it was not so important. We are all fighting with German. But it

was not also so easy. I remember, when the soldiers from uprising was leaving Stare Miasto and going through canal-- you know, they are going through?

Canal?

Canals to the other part of the town.

Oh, tunnels. Underground?

No, no, no, no, it was this what [INAUDIBLE] is going. So they, the soldiers were going-- Polish soldiers, uprising, Polish soldiers-- were going from Stare Miasto to Zoliborz through this tunnel. Sewers. And they were taking them at night from the opening on the street.

One of these girl told me later that when they came out, she had very black hair. Said, I haven't-- I don't think that she was Jewish. And one of the uprising people helping her told her, oh, why we should help you? You are a Jew, you are Jewish, and push her some kind away. And of course, the other people tell, no, no, no she's, you know, with us. But it was, my goodness, even at this time.

But mostly, at this time, it was this part. For me, it was not important. We are all on the every day can be killed. Many times, not once. It was really bad. And then Warsaw uprising, what is no reason to go into details right now, finished in end of September, '44.

And we are taken to the camp to Pruszkow. And it was a big, big camp. And mostly, the people are going to work, and to the German. The younger people were sent. Some people, they were sent to the camp for soldiers. It was different ways. Some people ran away, simply.

And we went with my friend Zofia and her mother, find her on the way from Warsaw to Pruszkow, we jumped from the train in Skierniewice. The train was going very slowly through the station. And we jumped from train.

The train was open. They didn't have roofs. The wagons, they didn't have roofs. If somebody help you, you can jump all over. And we jump all over. And then I stay with them in their friend's house. I was very sick. I had pneumonia. We all had places, lices?

Lice.

Lice. We all had lice, were very dirty, hungry, not eating for many days at this time. And I had very bad pneumonia. And even I don't remember. I think I was not completely conscious lying in this. People were very nice, they gave us baths and clean clothes. Our clothes was only to be burned, it was so dirty. And these animals all over.

And I have some kind of foggy remembering of this place. And I stayed through October, quite sick over there. And some strange possibility in November, my mother find that I survived. And she survived and my brother survived on the completely other part of the town, completely different. We didn't know about us for three months, more than three months.

And she went. And she picked me up from these people, what I think is they were quite happy that she took me away. And she took me away to some big house for displaced person from Warsaw, near Krakow.

And I stay over there, what was terribly dirty. And we were happy. We had one small bed for two people. I remember a long time that it was very strange for me to sleep alone. Everybody sleep two people on this small bed. Or if it was worse, three people on the bed.

And we were very hungry. And they give us a very small amount of food. And the people were very unpleasant for us. Not for it. And then on the end of November, I went to Krakow myself. And I found myself a job in a small, some kind of a chronic hospital for old and displaced people.

And they were very short with any help. And they took me immediately when I told that I finished one year of nursing school and I can be a nurse. It was the most dirty and terrible place what I ever worked.

But at least I was able to survive. I was living small room with other woman. And they gave her some soup twice a day. And we knew that the war would finish soon. And war would finish, as you know, for us in January '45. So it was soon after I was working over there for two months.

Who liberated you?

Soviets, of course, Soviets.

That's what I thought. Whatever you feel like telling.

Oh, I'm telling you everything. I was not, never-- that the war finished. And immediately, when the university opened in Krakow, I wanted to go to medical school in Krakow. I was not admitted. They told me that I didn't finish high school.

And it was very difficult for me to prove. I had some small proof, they told me that it is not enough. Whatever. Happened I moved from Krakow with my mother and my brother.

We moved to Wroclaw, what is Breslau, what is in Silesia. And it was easy town at this time for some reason. Because it was very easy to have apartments. They sent all German. The town was destroyed, but still it was some good houses. And the Germans were sent back to Germany and displaced persons. And we got some nice apartment.

And I was admitted to medical school. And my brother went to the Gymnasium. And my mother got a job as a librarian in the polytechnical school in Breslau. So we started some kind in quotation life, normal life.

We were very poor, of course. My mother's salary was very low. And it was difficult for us to live. And I had some strange jobs during my medical school, trying to make a little money.

My father was helping a little bit. My father was in England, sending some parcels. Sometimes with food, sometimes with something what we can sell. And this way, we survived. And I finished medical school. And I stayed in Poland. I was married, I had children. And I left Poland in 1971. Yes, forever, with children.

Well, I want to thank you very much for your very candid.

What I think I should add-- what I should add, I feel almost obligated to add. What's happened to other my family. I think it is interesting.

The family on my father's side, they were more no, not accommodated. OK, they mostly converted before war. And nobody, or almost nobody, as I know, didn't go to ghetto. They stay on Polish side.

And they had very, very difficult time. Partially because they were quite wealthy. And if you had money, of course, it was easier to survive. But also, you were under constant attention on the informers that are coming to the house and telling, well, give us some money. If not, you Jew, give us some money. If not, we will go to Gestapo and to police.

We were so poor, and it was obvious that we don't have any money, that the informer, I think, didn't pay too much attention to us. Because we are not attractive for them. So my aunt always was telling us that you survived, your family, direct family, you survived the war because you were too poor to be interesting for anybody. And some of them, they survived. Some of them they were given by informer to the police and Gestapo, and they were killed.

My mother's family, practically everybody was killed. They were not converted. They were Jewish. And everybody knew the truth. They never changed the name. The name was Dajches, my mother's brother. And nobody survived. They all perished in Auschwitz with my cousin, who was younger than I am, with children. Practically, practically everybody.



I gather all this name for Yad Vashem. And it was more than 20 people. Everybody was killed.

Sorry to hear that. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview? Any episodes that you didn't recount to me that you would like to? Or anything else that you would like to say at this point?

I think only that it can be said much better that I did. No, I don't think so.

It was some kind of chaotic.

This was very eloquent.

Basically, that's all. I tried to keep facts. I tried not to give too much of my opinion.

Oh, that's OK, too, though.

Well, It's different, I think. I think, basically, that's all.

OK. Well, thank you.

Thank you.