

INTERVIEW WITH DR. JANINA PROT

APRIL 1, 1992

LEXINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Dr. Prot, could you please tell me your name and the date of your birth and the place of birth.

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, they don't work. I was born on February 8, 1926 in Poland, in a small town named Nowe Miasto, near Warsaw.

Could you tell me about your childhood, what was it like growing up in your town, and 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 in my childhood I changed my place of living because my parents were divorced, and part of my childhood I spent with my father and part with my mother. I have a brother who is two years younger and for some time, before the war, we were separated, because he was with my mother, I was with my father. There were 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 munitions and explosive materials in Poland. I was living with him near Radom in a small town Pionki which was near a big factory. We lived in a big house with a big garden. I didn't go to school.

You didn't?

No, in Pionki was a small country-like elementary school, and my father did not want to send me to this kind of school because the education was not too good. So, I was taught at home with two other girls with a private tutor and we had lessons at home. In the afternoon I had to do my homework, as all children. 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 the last year before the war, when we moved to Warsaw and I started with they call in Poland "Gymnasium"--a junior high.

Could you tell me about your religious life in your home, or respective homes with your parents?

Now we have started one of the complicated parts of my life. My parents converted to Catholicism before I was born. Most of my family were completely, as they say, "assimilated" family. They never feel they have too much to do with Jewish habits. My father, I think, was the biggest Polish patriot that I ever met in my life, and I think almost everybody on my father's side, probably in the 20's, after the first war, converted to Catholicism or to Protestantism. Not in my mother's family. My mother was, I think, only one. So I grew up as a Catholic girl. My parents were not very religious in any religion but officially they were Catholic, and I was brought up with other children, so they wanted me probably to be the same as the other girls. I was baptized, and I went to First Communion being, I think, 8 years old. 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. My parents never went to the church. But if I wanted to go to the church with the other girls or if I wanted to go to the church with a servant, it was permitted; it was fine. I really discovered who am I when the war started and we all discovered that we are not Poles anymore, that we are Jews and we are treated as Jews by everybody around.

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

Oh, yes, of course, everybody knew. It was some kind of thing that tactful people don't talk about. We are living between educated, intellectual people and many of them have what they call in Poland, mixed marriages. One of them was Jew, one of them was Pole, and almost everybody has some grandmother who is a Jew. And probably until late 30's I don't know if my father really felt a big antisemitism. I think later something started, because I remember that about '38 or the beginning of '39 he started to talk that he would like to quit his job, which was very well paid, and also I think he enjoyed what he was doing. I never had an 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 being taught at home. It was practically not even possible to be exposed to the Polish antisemitism. I knew that it existed; I knew it was something really bad, but I never took it personally. I grew up in very liberal house. It was bad to be antisemitic, it was bad to think that black people are different and all people should be equal. You can imagine how it is.

Also, I imagine you didn't have too many black people.

No, no, but there was this kind of feeling in the house. People are equal.

Can I ask you more about your childhood. Do you remember if you had any interest or hobbies, or music, or things that you pursued or enjoyed to do?

I don't think so. I was a very unhappy, socially isolated child. I was unhappy because my parents were divorced.

How old were you when they were divorced?

I was about 4 years old. And they were constantly fighting to have the children. My father wanted to have both of us and my mother, of course wanted to have both of us. And we were constantly for different reasons, switched from one parent to the other. My mother was a very tense, nervous, anxious, neurotic person. I was much more happy with my father. But my mother, when I was with her for vacation, was constantly telling me, "How come 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 a very shy, unhappy and frustrated child. I was a very good student and I was reading books from age 5. I had times I was reading two books per day. Everyone was looking and saying, "What sort of wonderful child, reading and reading and reading." No, it was my escape--not to be exposed to the family problem, not to play with children where they could ask me, where is your mother? I always had very strong feelings that I am different. It was a very difficult childhood.

Was this up through your teenagerhood?

No, I was a teenager during the war. I was also unhappy but in a different way. The war started when I was 13, and just before the war I moved to Warsaw, 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 one talk with a maid. I was probably 7 years old, I wanted to go with her to the church. My grandmother, my paternal grandmother, was living with us when I was with my father. I really didn't like her, she was very victorian, very rigid and stiff and constantly trying to correct my behavior. I remember telling the maid, "I know why she doesn't want me to go to the church--because she is Jewish." And I remember the maid looking around and didn't know what to say. So

I knew there was something around. I cannot clearly tell you when I found out, probably I was about 12, but still the people didn't talk about it. It was full denial. Of course, immediately after the war, we all find out who we are. Nothing more, nothing less, but the Jews...

After the war?

When the war started.

Do you want to talk about that a little, where were you, what was going on, what did you end up doing?

War started, as you know, September 1, '39. I came from vacation, the last vacation I spent with my father, to Warsaw. 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 who was a sister of my father. For a reason I was never able to understand, everybody had the feeling that it was more safe to be in the downtown Warsaw than all around. Life showed that it was completely different. And then it was the siege of the Warsaw. We stayed all time with the apartment of my aunt and her husband and her daughter which was 10 years older at this time and also their daughter-in-law because the son, my cousin was in the army, an officer in the army. So his wife was in this big apartment and her three-months-old child. It was a 7 or 8 room apartment in downtown Warsaw. And September 25, it was the worst bombardment of Warsaw. And one of the first bomb drop on this house. My cousin was killed at the place, wife of my cousin and three-month-old baby was killed and her mother was killed. Four people were killed, being about, I don't know, five yards from me. Soon the house collapsed and we stayed in the basement of the collapsed house. We survived--my aunt, her husband, my mother, my brother, and myself. The first phase of the war finished, Warsaw gave up, it was September 29 or 30, and we went back to our apartment on the north part of the Warsaw. It was not badly destroyed, no glass in the windows, but otherwise it was the same as before. Then we discovered that we don't have any money. My father disappeared, we knew he was in the army, we did not know if he was killed or what has happened. And, also, I think my mother knew that the pressure against Jews had started. I think in October or November of 1939, it was the order that the Jews had put the armband with the Star of the David. Of course we didn't. We are in complete denial that we are not, we are not Jews, but we knew that we are. And I think the landlords, owner of the house where we were living, he probably knew it. People knew of these kinds of things. So we are hanging around, not having too much money, even to buy bread. In November '39, my father showed up from the army. He knew very well that he could not stay in Poland for many reasons. He started immediately to try to go through the green border, illegally, to Hungary. Finally, he went to Hungary at the end of December 1939 and from Hungary to France and from France to England and I never saw him again. So the last time I saw him it was for a brief time in December or

November 1939. And we decided to move from Warsaw to some kind of convent which was near Warsaw and my mother had good friends there.

Could you tell me a little bit about this convent?

It was an interesting place. The convent was of Franciscan Sisters. It was organized by Mother Czacka. The congregation was quite liberal and plenty of people from Catholic-Polish aristocracy from intellectual circles, they stick to this convent--it was what they call French Catholicism. The Sisters were running schools and workshops for blind children. Mother Czacka, the Mother Superior, was blind herself. Some Jewish intellectuals were also connected with this convent. Two nuns in high position were of Jewish origin--they converted. My mother knew some of them before the war and was very friendly with them. In December, 1939, they invited us to stay there. They could not give us so much as an apartment, but I got a room and my mother could help with the garden, which she loved to do and I can go to school. Whatever, I don't think we had a clear plan on what we would be doing. I think everyone hoped that the war would be finished in one year. So we would survive one year. Nobody expected what really happened.

So, in the very end of 1939 we pack our belongings with very few of our furniture, some basic things and moved to Laski, which was 10 kilometers north of Warsaw. We stayed in a 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 in the kitchen or in the washroom or doing whatever needs to be done. I was bored to death, it was nothing to do, nothing to read, it was no people in my age, I was not allowed to go, of course, to Warsaw or any other place. Probably here is the good place to say that I did not look like a Polish girl. I had very black hair, black eyes, rather dark skin and obviously, it was difficult for me to walk on a Warsaw street, not being asked, "Hey, stop, you are Jewish?" or "Are you a Jew?" My brother didn't look like a Polish child either with curly black hair, but he was not circumcised, and this way it was easier to save him than it was to save me. My mother, if we were talking how we looked--she looked wonderful, she absolutely didn't look Jewish; nobody ever suspected that she was Jewish. She had a small, very pretty face, completely grey hair and she did not have any problem when she was walking around. The difficulty was our documents. We keep our name Prot because it doesn't have any Polish, Jewish or any other meaning, but my mother's maiden name is Dajches. She was Zosia Dajches. So all our documents were changed and my mother's maiden name was given *Kossouth*, what is a typical Hungarian name and it was given in this goal so that if someone was asking during the war, "Oh, you look somewhat strange, you look Jewish, you have so black hair" I was telling immediately, "Oh, yes, I have black hair because my grandmother was Hungarian, you know. My mother's name is Kossouth." And the documents were changed with the help of the nuns, where we stayed and I think it were very good documents. We had baptismal documents. It was filled out in church's books, so it was possible to check that it is not false. Some priests were able to do this if they wanted to false the records in church books. So, we had not too bad documents for the war. Do you want to know what happened to me later?

Yes, if you want to give this straight narrative -- you were in the convent..

Then--I am in the convent, it was about 1940. All this year we stayed together, my mother, my brother and myself. It was very hard, it was very poor, it was not enough food. We did not have enough clothes, but we felt quite safe. In 1940, it was the feeling that the war would not finish so quickly. I tried to press my mother very badly that I would like to go back to school, and I begged her to go back to Warsaw because I want to go to school, to my gymnasium and it is not possible for me to lose so much time. 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 go to school. I moved with them--I'm sure they knew who am I. I am quite sure. Of course, we never talk about it. It was some kind of agreement that it would be complete denial. They don't know I am Jewish. I have all my documents, I am a Polish girl with a Polish name, I am Catholic. It was very helpful that I knew Catholic religion very well and of course, all prayers. It was no problem for me to go to the church and I knew how to behave during the Mass. It was a big help. I went to school and it was difficult for the first year and then the next year, how it was? It was about 1941 I stayed with these friends for about half a year and then I was quite unhappy with their children. It was very cold, it was somewhat dirty and I was hungry all the time and my mother decided that I am big enough--I was about 14 or 15--that I could live alone. She arranged another place, because no one had money for a room, but through some friends that found an older woman who wanted to have some company and she rented me a bed in her room. It was in Zoliborz, it was more close to my school and I stayed with her. She was a nice woman and I was going to school. Remember, I had to cook for myself, I had to feed myself and it was absolutely nothing to eat. I was awfully, terribly hungry all day long. I had only this rationed which was possible to buy. Of course, you could buy all kinds of things during the war on the black market, but I didn't have any money. So, for dinner I cooked some kind of kasha and I ate the piece of bread for breakfast, and this kasha that I cooked with water, I ate in the afternoon. I remember being very, very hungry. Now I have to move back a little bit. The ghetto was organized much earlier, but it was more south from the part of the town where I was living, and I avoid very much going to the downtown. I was living in the north part of Warsaw-Bielany and later in Zoliborz. The school was in Zoliborz, and I practically never go downtown because it was very unsafe. The few times that I went, I saw the wall of the ghetto and the streetcar was going through the ghetto. It was a big ghetto and a small ghetto connected by a wooden bridge. The streetcar was going through ghetto, not stopping of course. And I remember on one of my trips through the ghetto, it was probably in 1941, I took the streetcar and then it was possible to see the streets through the streetcar windows. And then I saw dead people lying on the streets. This I remember, dead boys and children covered with newspaper. I didn't know what to do, I didn't know to look, or not to look, or what to do. This I remember very clearly.

Did people talk about when the streetcar went through the ghetto? No one said a word?

No. Windows were blocked in some towns. If you see the movie *Europa, Europa*--I'm sure you did--he's looking through some kind of scratch. If I remember correctly, the windows were not blocked in this streetcar that 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 wall that we see the Port Brama-entrance with Polish and German police. At this time, sometime you are able to see Jews on the street going to do some work in the town. Of course with German soldier or police with guns. Sometimes we saw this small group of Jews out of the ghetto. I think it was about 1941-42. Also, this was probably in 1941, I was inside the ghetto only once during the war. Should I tell you the story about what happened?

Yes, please.

I went downtown Warsaw with some other children of my friends who were half-Jewish and half-Polish. We were very stupid. We tried to change streetcar near the ghetto wall which was the most dangerous place, because the people hanging around we call, in Poland, *szmakownik*. Do you know what is *szmakownik*? Informers. The people who pick you up in the street and "Oh, you are Jew, and give us money. If not, we are going to the police." So we stop there on the street, at the streetcar stop near the ghetto entrance and, of course, immediately they pick us. My friend was a little older, I was about 14 and she was, I think, 16. They took us to the police station at the entrance to the ghetto, and inside the ghetto to some kind of, I remember, big room and they started to ask us for documents and what we are doing. You are Jews and how come we are out of the ghetto. We are sitting and I keep telling them, "We are not Jews, absolutely not. This is a mistake. Please let us go, it is a mistake." I do not know how, I and the other girl, how we had the nerve to tell that. In some moment it came this, I remember very clearly, some older man, a Jew with a band on his arm, and he came to me and asked me "Why you don't have a band?" So I said, "I am not Jewish; there is no reason for me to have an armband." Oh, how come, you are Jewish, 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. Do you have parents? I can call them where you are. I can help you if you give me some money. It was clear that he was working with the police and I look at him and I told him very firmly, "I am not Jewish and please go away and leave me alone." He went away, and then the Polish policeman came and asked me about documents. I did not have enough because I don't have yet Kennkarte; the Kennkarte was given when you were 16. I found a small piece of paper, from school what I was attending one year before the war. It was a Catholic school. I show him this and told him "Do you think if I would be Jewish, I would be going to Catholic school before the war?" He looked at us and he let us go. He pushed us through the entrance and we took the streetcar. Since then I knew very well I have to keep far away from this place. In 1942, I was still going to school and was living with this woman but I started to have problems at this time. I think the woman did not know who I am, but I remember a few times they picked me on the street, this Polish informer, they told me "oh, you are Jewish, go with us." Mostly I tried to tell them, "No I am not, go away." Because I knew that once I would tell them, "Yes", or if I would give them some

money, it would be the end. And some people, even in school, they asked me, some girls they ask me, Why you look so Jewish and I always tell the story: "Well, I have black hair because I am Hungarian descendent." But it was, I don't know how to tell you, it started to be as I was constantly, day and night, twenty-four hours on the stage. That I am playing somebody that I am not. When in this situation, somebody pick you up on the street frequently, the Jewish people became very confused. You could see fear on their faces. I learn not to have it on my face. I learn when they pick me up to smile and say, "Ha, ha, how funny." But I remember psychologically I was somewhat exhausted. It was denial and denial and it was no one with whom I could talk openly. Absolutely nobody. Because even it was some friends I would be with and I knew that they know, but it was taboo. We never talk about it; never admit that they know; never talk about this problem. You might think it is funny, but time to time when my mother visited me, we never talked about it! It was denial between my mother and myself. It was something that we never, never talk about. My mother always told me, remember you are Hungarian, and I knew why she was saying this, but it was impossible to say, "We'll talk about it." Talk about what has happened to the rest of the family? Never, never. To make things more complicated, at this time my mother had to move from this convent where she was staying with my brother. I think it was 1942, and one day they told her that there are some informers telling the police that she is Jewish and that my brother is a Jew, and they told them if they did not go away in a few hours, they will be taken to the police. So my mother took my brother, leaving everything absolutely behind, I think she took some clothes with her and as much money as they had, as they had not too much, of course, and they went by foot to Warsaw and then I know from her stories, she did not have any place to go. She was walking on the street in Warsaw, keeping by hand this very Jewish-looking boy. She did not have anyplace to go, and it would be curfew in a few hours. It was in summer, 1942, it became the evening and you cannot stay on the street. It was some small hospital, in downtown Warsaw run by nuns. My mother knocked to the door of this small hospital. The nun opened and my mother told the nun, "This boy is very sick and he has to be in the hospital right now." The nun, of course, did not want to take him and my mother almost forced herself into--I told you my mother always looked very elegant--and told her, "I am very sorry, dear nun, but he has appendicitis and has to be operated on now." So the nun did not know what to do, but she opened the door and put my brother to the bed. The next day, I don't know if the doctor was seeing him or not. My mother left him with the nun as a very sick child in the bed, and went around Warsaw to find a place where they can take him. I think some friends took him for a few days, and then he was placed in an orphanage with the children of the Polish officers who perished during the war. It was special organization helping this kind of children named R. G. O., *Rada Gto'wna Opiekun'esa*. They had some houses where they took children who did not have fathers. So my brother remained in the orphanage, my mother took a job as a helper of sick woman with children, or a tutor of children, or a live-in maid. I was going to school and living with this old woman but quickly it started also to be impossible. I think somebody informed her, she said I could no longer stay with her without giving me clear reason. During this time, I think it was 1942, some children from ghetto were running the streets of Warsaw and begging for bread. You could see them on the street running in *schmattas*, very hungry mostly without hair. They had some kind of cans and they bang on these metal cans making noise and some, not all the people, are throwing food to these cans. It was in winter, 1941-42. The children were dying from hunger. When the Germans see them, they shoot them simply on the street. In this apartment



building where I was living with this woman--she was going to work and I was back from school about 3:00 in the afternoon--it was a child sleeping on the stairs, with this big noisy can. He was banging on this can asking the people to throw some I throw some food, some bread, and he remember what I did and the next day he showed again. He was on my door, banging on this can. I don't know if you could understand my situation--how terribly dangerous it was to have a Jewish child at the door. I open the door and I again throw some food. I really didn't know what to do. I was dying that the neighbors will open the door and then it would be a horrible situation for me. He came again and then he came again. But I was in fear of this poor child. I never had this kind of fear; I was sitting at home and almost praying to God not to send this child anymore, because I did not know what to do; open the door or not open the door. At this time me mother really didn't know what to do with me. Summer, 1942, started, my mother's friends found some friends near Lowicz. It was an agriculture school for the peasant girls and they sent me over there so I can help and work in the fields. They agreed to take me. That means that I would have a bed and food and then I can work. And I went there knowing that I don't have anyplace to go, nobody doesn't want to take me. I started to work and I was terribly unhappy, but I was unhappy all the time, it was nothing new. I was only one girl with dark hair between this Polish peasant, very simple girls sleeping in these big rooms with more than twenty beds. I had one bed between them and I was working in the fields or taking care of cows, garden, or taking out weeds. I learned a lot. The girls never suspected that I could be Jewish. They were simple and it was too far from their imagination. I was going with them to the church and they were surprised that I have different hobbies and different clothes. They asked me thousands of naive questions as what for I am reading books.

Where did you get books at this time?

They had some small library. It was very boring, as 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 played they did not know. It was again some kind of denial. I had my documents and this time I had Kennkarte. As you can see, it was general agreement that I am not Jewish. I stayed there quite a long time. I didn't go back to Warsaw, I did not go back to school. It was not possible. I was working, I was very exhausted, very lonely, there was absolutely nobody to talk. I was still only 16. I got hepatitis and I was very sick. Of course, I was not seen by any physician. I was lying in bed with high fever, as yellow as lemon. After hepatitis, as I understand now, but not at this time, I had very deep depression. I was unable to do anything physically or mentally. I was sitting in the corner of the room and I was even unable to read. I was staring by window. I did not want anyone to talk to me and I didn't want to answer. It was for about three or four weeks and everybody was surprised what is going on. They think I am going crazy. After this time I went back to work. I was very weak and everybody was laughing because I cannot work too much. They told me I was lazy. Believe me, I wasn't lazy, I was sick. But I was dragging my foot. One of the girls in school got typhoid fever and they decided I was the best person to take care of her. They put us together in the small room. I had always some kind of nursing capability. I was interested in medicine. I was taking care of her and she was so sick that they took her in the hospital and she

died. It was December 1942, yes it was December. I remember I was still not very healthy and I went to bring water from the well. It was a very windy day and I had long hair which I combed nicely back and put them together, but it was in the morning and my hair, I think, was down and it was windy and my hair was waving. Suddenly the car with Germans came to the school for something--they were coming frequently. I was always hiding someplace when I saw that the car is coming. And just as I was taking this water the car with the Germans 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? So he said that I could not stay there 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's 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, Sophia Kielan, with whom I am still very friendly. I was good friends with both sisters, Zofia and Christina, 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 tried to catch all that they learned during the last six months. For all my war time, it was probably the best time. I was treated as a third daughter. I think they like me and I treat them as my parents. Of course, they knew and I knew that they know. I had all my papers, I had documents, I had my Kennkarte, I have big beautiful picture of my first communion. It was very important that I have it. I stayed with them until May 1943.

Does that mean after ghetto uprising?

Yes. The time was very difficult for the Jews. It was plenty of informers. It was very difficult to be on the street. Many times they stop me; still sometimes I had to go to downtown Warsaw. I had to pretend that I was a 'normal person'; that I am moving around as everybody else. I didn't mention before--but I cannot talk about everything at the same time--I was in the Polish underground movement, from age 14 or 15. I was involved with my friends, Sophia and Christine Kielan. I was in Polish underground army youth organization, which was Szare Szeregi, grey tows. We had our meetings and we had some underground activities. It was a danger, but for me it was also some kind of protection. I don't know if you understand why. Unfortunately, I did not only fear the Germans, I fear, above all, the Poles. The Germans were not dangerous for me directly; indirectly, yes. But directly it was the Poles, somebody on the street, or ex-friends, or someone who knew who was my father, or they stopped me because they recognized me, or some neighbors, or concierge. Being in the Polish underground movement created some kind of protection. I am with Polish youth, I am in the underground movement and cannot be Jewish. We had our meetings; we had small different tasks. I remember they gave me a Polish underground newspaper called Biuletyn Informacyjny. They gave me a bunch of them, I don't know, twenty or more and they asked me to deliver to different houses. It was what the young people were doing. I didn't want to take it; I didn't want to take it not because I didn't want to, but my danger was my face. I didn't want because if they pick me up with the underground materials who knows what I will tell if they will start to beat me up. But I didn't want to tell them that I didn't want to take it. Everybody will be thinking,

why not? Of course, it was out of the questions to tell them--what was most simply--"Look at me. Do you really want me to walk on the street with this kind of look with underground material?" So you can see it was constant struggle how to avoid this kind of involvement. I remember one other scene. I was going to school with my friend, Sophia, and her mother gave us some small lunch with us, piece of bread, we had in the pocket. We walk. It was not very far from the home and there was a Jewish child sitting with a can, this completely emaciated child sitting with this can and banging, half dead looking. We both took our lunch from our pocket and throw away to his can. This Polish woman noticed it and started to run after us screaming "You dirty Jewish helpers." She was very angry that we gave this piece of bread to the Jewish child. Now let's talk about the Jewish uprising. The uprising started just before Easter. I think it started on Thursday and from the place that we were living--it was fifth floor, the window faced to the south--we could see the flames and even when it was quiet at night, it was no street movement, you can hear people screaming. And then, of course, smoke, and constant guns shot. We all tried not to go near the ghetto. It was very dangerous at this times, as was many times described. And then I remember a few days after the ghetto uprising started, it was Easter breakfast in the house of our friends. I think they have a hard time with me too, because all the relatives started to tell them--why do you keep this strange-looking girl; we are sure she is Jewish, and so on and so on. But it was a big breakfast and the relatives and friends were invited and we were sitting at the table and eating and the windows are open and you can see the smoke and hear the guns. It was hard for me to take it. It was some feelings that I am not in the right place, that probably I should be over there, not here. And some of these people sitting in the room, I remember, saying, 'Good that the Germans are doing for us the dirty work.' It is a poem by Czeslaw Mitosz, do you know Campo dei Fiori? As I told you it was not good to go near the ghetto at this time, but I went once or twice and I remember that on the Platz Krasinski, it was a small some kind of carnival. It was music and the people are going on the carousel and it was beautiful weather and it was the wall of ghetto, and shooting and smoke and screaming, and here people were playing. It was described in Mitosz poem and it was this way as he described. Czeslaw Mitosz: *Compo dei Fiori*.

...The bright melody drowned the salvos from the ghetto wall, and couples were flying high in the cloudless sky. At times wind from the burning would drift dark kites along and riders on the carousel caught petals in mid-air...

You want to hear what happens to me later. I finish school at this time, I finish gymnasium, and we had some kind of examination and matura. I do not go into detail because it has nothing to do with my personal story, Jewish story. Gymnasium was not existing during the war and we had what they call komplety. It was an underground school and we move from one house to another and teachers were coming and this way I finished gymnasium, with small groups of other girls and in May, 1943 we had to take matura, high school diploma exam. Both my friends went to underground university which was also active during the war in Warsaw, and I decided to go to the school for nurses. At this time I knew that I want to be a physician. So I decided to go to school for nurses. It was a very good school in Warsaw. It was run by a woman, Mrs. Romanowski; I remember her. And she decided to take me even though I was below the age. You have to be 17 to be admitted and I was sixteen and a half. She agreed to take me as a student. We were working in the hospital in the

morning and in the afternoon we had lessons. It was a dormitory on the last floor; one room for four girls and we were able to live there--also very poor food, but at least it was something to eat. This way I was all set, I can tell, because I was able to stay there. Also it was safer because I had a nurse uniform with some kind of a white hat and I feel that I did not look so different in this. My hair was pulled back; my uniform was all white and I was always careful to be extremely clean and in order. You know it was very important not to look neglected. What was very strange, the directress of the school, I think, she knew very well who am I. I think some people called her and ask her to take me. At first she agreed to take me even though I was below the age. And second, every new pupil has some kind of task to do in school. For instance, keep the bathrooms clean or keep the corridors clean or clean the table after breakfast. 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, 5:30 in the morning, and clean the chapel and put the flowers and then help the priest with Mass. After Mass, you don't know this because it is completely different now, the priest was going to give Communion to the sick people in the hospital. And I was the one going before the priest with a candle and a small bell making noise and to show him who wanted to have Communion. That was my task for every day morning.

Where was your mother at this time?

My mother was working for some people with problems. I remember, in one house, the woman had cancer and she had small children and my mother was helping. She never had any specific problem as a Jewish woman. We had also other problems: we didn't have any money, we didn't have an apartment. My brother stayed in the orphanage. He had problems because he looked too dark; he had curly, dark hair. At this time, I think he knew that he was not circumcised and he knew that he can prove he is not Jewish. I stayed in the nurses' school until 1944, when it starts the Warsaw uprising. I was still in the Polish underground movement and still had to take some orders from them--we were soldiers. So, when Warsaw uprising started I had to go to my unit; I was two months in the army. I was useful after one year's nursing school. I was with a paramedics group; it was four or five girls in this group. We stayed two months together, being almost killed many, many times, but at this time, at least, I was no different than the other people; we were all fighting with Germans. But it was not also so easy, I remember when the Polish soldiers from uprising were leaving Stare Miasto and going through sewerage and they are taking them in the night through the openings in the street. One of the girls told me later that when they were taking her out--she had very black hair like I had but I don't think she was Jewish--one of the people helping her said, "Why should we help you, you are Jewish", and pushed her away. Of course other people said, "No, no, she is with us." But mostly at this time it was not important how do you look, everyday we could be killed, not once, but many times. The uprising finished in end of September 1944, and we were taken to a camp, to Pruszkow. It was a big camp and most of the people were taken to Germany. We went with my friend Sophia and her mother from Warsaw to Pruszkow. Then we were taken to the train; the train was going very slowly through the station and we jumped from the train. The train was open, they didn't have a roof, if somebody helped you, you could jump over. Then I stayed with them in their friend's house. I was very sick, I had pneumonia. We all had louse, we

were very dirty, probably not eating for many days. Even I don't remember, I think I was not completely conscious. The people were very nice, they gave us baths and clean clothes. Our clothes were only to be burned; they were so dirty and louse-infested. I have some kind of foggy memory of this place. I stayed through October, 1944, and in November, my mother found that I survived, and she survived and my brother survived. They were in a completely other part of the town; we did not know about each other for more than three months. My mother came and she took me away to some big house for displaced persons from Warsaw, near Krakov. It was terribly dirty place and we were happy if we had one small bed for two people. Everybody sleeps two people on one bed, or if it was worse, three people on the bed. We were very hungry, there was a small amount of food and the people were very unpleasant for us. And on the end of November, I went to Krakov myself and I found myself a job in a small chronic hospital for old and displaced people. They were very short with any help and they took me immediately when I told them I finished one year of nursing school. It was the most terrible place that I ever worked, but at least I was able to survive. I was living in a small room with another woman and they gave us some food twice a day, and we knew the war would finish soon. And war finished for us, in January 1945. I was working over there for two months.

Who liberated you?

The Soviets, of course. The war finished and immediately when the university opened in Krakov, I wanted to go to Medical School in Krakov, I was not admitted. They told me that I didn't finish high school. I had some small proof of my final exams but they said it was not enough. In fall, 1945, I moved from Krakov with my mother and my brother to Ntactaw--Breslau in Silesia. It was an easy town for some reason--it was easy to have an apartment. The town was destroyed, but still there were some good houses. The Germans were sent to Germany as displaced persons. And we got some nice apartment and I was admitted to medical school and my brother went to gymnasium and my mother got a job as a librarian in the Polytechnical School in Ntactaw. So we started some kind of normal life. We were very poor, of course. My mother's salary was very low and it was difficult for us to live. I had some strange jobs during my years at medical school, trying to make a little money. My father was helping a little--my father was in England sending some parcels, sometimes with food and sometimes with something what we could 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.

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

But I think I should add, I almost feel obligated to add what has happened to other members of my family. The family on my father's side, they mostly converted before the war and nobody, or almost nobody went to ghetto. They stayed on the Polish side and they had a very difficult time. They

were wealthy and if you had money, of course it was easier to survive. But, also, you were under constant attention of informers that are coming to the house and telling, "Well, give us some money, you Jew, give us some money. If not we will go to the Gestapo and the police." We were so poor and it was so obvious that we don't have any money that the informers did not pay much attention to us because we were not attractive for them. So one of my aunts always said we survived the war because you were too poor to be of interest for anybody. And, some of them survived and some of them they were given by informers to police and Gestapo and they were killed. In my mother's family, almost everyone was killed. They never converted, they were Jewish and everybody knew they were Jewish. They never changed their name--their name was Dajches and they all perished in Auschwitz. I gathered all the names for Yad Vashem. It was more than twenty people.

I'm sorry to hear that. Is there anything else you would like to add, any episodes you didn't recount to me, or anything else you would like to say to me at this point?

I think only that it can be said much better than I did. I try to keep on facts. I think, basically, that's all. Thank you.

NOTE: At the request of Dr. Prot, corrections (both additions and deletions) were made in the original transcript. This copy includes those changes and does not purport to be an exact transcript of the tape.