

Interview with Matylda Szymaniak
June 15, 1992
Annandale, Virginia

Q: Please begin.

A: Yes?. During the Occupation and before the war, I was named Matylda Szymaniak. My maiden name was Garfunkel. I was born on February 27, 1913, in Lvov.

Q: Could you say something about your life before the war? That is especially interesting to us.

A: Before the war my husband, Henryk Schnejd, worked in a paper factory in Klucze near Olkusz as a chemical engineer. I would go to Zawiercie, where I worked seasonally in the pharmacy, whenever they needed me. The war came when we were in Klucze near Olkusz

Q: I'm very sorry, but do you think we could hear more about your childhood and family life.

A: I do not know if this will interest them, because I was from a very progressive home.

Q: That doesn't make the slightest difference.

A: My childhood passed --- will you turn it off?

Q: No, why? We're recording.

A: You are? My childhood was --- wonderful. Wonderful. I had very good parents. My mother had a very large family. She had five brothers and a sister. We all lived wonderfully. Almost everyone died. Hardly anyone survived. My brother, whom I loved very much, who was a role model for me in every way, happily as it turned out, though it was a tragedy at the time, died in May 1939. That was the last time I was in Lvov before the war.

Q: At the funeral?

A: At my brother's funeral, yes.

Q: So where did you live before the war?

A: In Klucze near Olkusz.

Q: But with your family?

A: With my husband.

Q: I mean before that, before you were married.

A: In Lvov, we all lived in Lvov. And my husband's parents, also in Lvov.

Q: Also.

A: Yes.

Q: Could you maybe describe your childhood home, for example?

A: Our house? It was a large apartment. I had my own room. My brother had his own room. The house was open. A dozen people would sit down to dinner together. My uncle was a lawyer near Lvov. He would come when he was arguing a case and come to dinner. Whoever was in town and whoever had nothing to eat would come to us. My father did not do badly. There was even an orphan from the Jewish orphanage who always had dinner with us, although my father was not a Zionist. My brother was a socialist. I had one uncle who was a Zionist. He died also. Everyone would quarrel, and everyone madly loved each other. I had a wonderful childhood.

Q: Did you go to school?

A: I finished high school, a boarding school in Lvov. Zofia Strzalkowska High School. There were a priest and a religion teacher named Szyper there. On graduation day, one of my friends, her name was Jolesowna --- I do not know who she was, I do not know where she was from. For some of the girls, who could not pay the 65 zloty, which was a lot of money, a month, our parents would get together and pay for them. Their tuition was lowered and our parents paid it. Jolesowna was a little nutty, so to speak, and the essay she wrote for her final exam was such that they did not want to graduate her. Then the priest, Franciszek Blotnicki, and the religion teacher, Natan Szyper, stood up and said that they would not leave that auditorium until Jolesowna got her diploma. It was that kind of school. Wonderful people, wonderful school. To this day, I have close contact with my friends from school. They also helped me after my escape after I reached Warsaw. They helped me very much and to this day they are my closest friends. At the same time, I was invited to Israel four years ago and went, with a friend. There was a party there thrown by others from other classes but from the same school. It was that kind of school. After getting my diploma, I went to pharmacy school. I finished that school and was awarded a pharmacist's degree. I was hired by my professor, Krzyzanowski, an excellent professor, to work in his pharmacy. It was the biggest pharmacy in eastern Little Poland. I worked there until my husband, whom I married during my second year of pharmacy, finished school and got a job in Klucze near Olkusz. And there we stayed until the war.

In the first days of the war, we tried to get through to Lvov and we walked from Olkusz through Ojcow to Cracow and on. But near Kolbuszowa the Germans stopped us and we had to go back.

Q: What was that like, how did they stop you?

A: Well, the Germans were there and that was the end of it. They were bombing the roads the whole time. Airplanes flew and strafed the people with machine guns. One went through the woods. My legs were destroyed. I had bandages all over my feet. There was no other way, we went back to Klucze. We returned and my husband went to the factory to work as usual. The Germans were there already. Because he knew German, he was useful to them as a translator at first. The workers like us very much, liked my husband very much. I first saw what the Germans were on New Year's Eve, 1939. The Germans lived in the house next to mine and they were shooting under our windows. My husband was at work at the factory and I, knowing the area very well, ran to him at the factory. In the morning it was peaceful. He got an exemption until the end of the year, I think, I do not remember how many months he worked there, but it ended. That was factory housing, we were by the factory. And then we moved to the village, to Klucze. We lived off whatever was given to us. We had no money at all.

Q: So people helped you?

A: Very much. They brought us potatoes so that we could have something to eat, because we would have had nothing. The gendarmerie was there by then, and there was a certain gendarme. There were two families left there then, we and one other family. I do not know if he summoned them also, but the commander of the gendarmerie, an elderly Austrian, summoned my husband and said that he would rather that we left, because they could come and take us away and we would disappear. He told us to move to a larger city, because here they could eliminate us at any minute. His manner was very obliging. Maybe he did not want to be involved. There was an engineer from Olkusz, a Pole named Lipczyk, a great philo-Semite, who proposed to my husband that he manage a factory in Sosnowiec. He said that he could fix it with a German owner, Skopek, so that Jews could work there. I do not know if they were paid anything. If they were it was pennies, but they were issued an Ausweis, that was the important thing. So we left Klucze. My husband left first and I stayed at first. But the first time that I went to visit my husband, the Germans came while I was gone and took all the furniture. I had no furniture left, only what they left me. I did not see why we should not be together, so I went to Sosnowiec, where he had been given a room at the factory. And we lived together in that factory. Not in the ghetto, but in that factory. There was no tight ghetto there yet. They began to make posts to which Jews had to report. The Jews that my husband was helping said to us "You are not registered here, you live in that factory, no harm can come to you, don't report yourselves at the post". Of those who went, they took all of the old people away. So then people saw what those posts meant. After some time went by, Skopek

opened another factory in Strzemieszyce. He offered my husband a transfer to Strzemieszyce, and we thought that we would go there, because there were some Jews from Teschen there. Once again, Skopek got free labor. There was an aluminum factory, or something like that. They gave us an apartment there, again not in the ghetto but by the factory, and we lived there.

Q: Who was this German Skopek?

A: I never laid eyes on him. I do not know. My husband never actually saw him either. But he had people working for him, Volksdeutsche from Silesia, who managed it all for him. One of them was a simple man, and my husband told him "Take it! They want you to be the director? Accept! I will do everything for you. Be the director". His name was Korona. He joined the NSDAP and everything was all right. There was another man there, a very decent man. I do not know his profession, maybe he was a teacher ---- But this was all the Reich, not the General-Government. They were mostly Silesians from Katowice. So we lived well with that director, and in that way people could work there and live. For a time. Eventually they told us that we could no longer live in the factory. We had to move. They had made a ghetto by then, and we had to move into it. But this was not a guarded ghetto, one could go out. Strzemieszyce is a very small town, the ghetto was just two streets or so. But it was separate from the factory, it was a ghetto. We found out then that an uprising had broken out in the Warsaw ghetto and we were very happy.

Q: This was 1943?

A: 1943, yes.

Q: How did you find out about the Uprising?

A: I cannot remember now. It is hard.

Q: I understand, it was a long time ago.

A: Yes. We found out that it had broken out and were happy -- we did not know that it had been suppressed. We were just happy that it had broken out. It was very hard for us. I do not think that he paid us anything, I do not know. I know that we ate the potatoes that they brought us. And the workers from Klucze would bring us potatoes in sacks. All the way from Klucze.

Q: So they helped you very much.

A: Very much. And what I have, because I have my furniture, is thanks to those workers. They watched where the items were taken, where the Germans took them. I owe only to them everything I recovered after the war.

Q: Extraordinary.

A: Extraordinary people. Extraordinary people. I had two Persian rugs. One of my husband's workers put one of them in his house between the ceiling and the attic, and he folded the other one and put it under his straw mattress. And I have them now. I have them now. One day we were woken up, it was about three o'clock. But they were taking people all the time, the county had to fill it's quota. The president of the county, his name was Flaschenberg, his wife was a dentist, and he was an extension of his wife, in a way. He had to give up a certain number of Jews every so often. So they took the old Jews, the old Hasidic Jews, until one day in the morning, I do not remember what time, "Heraus! Heraus! Heraus!". And we were ordered to stand in the square. I took two winter coats with me, because this was the end of June or beginning of July. I think the end of June because July 10 was our wedding anniversary and I remember thinking that by July 10 I would definitely be free. Standing on the square, my husband told me "Remember you are not thirty yet. Go to the young women's group". Then in 1943, I was exactly thirty years old. He said "Remember not to say that you are thirty. You are twenty eight years old if anyone asks". So I stood in that group and the things that I saw...My husband was a young man and we knew that he would be taken for work. But the horrors of that square torture me to this day. The mothers with small children who did not want to be separated from them. The husbands who also wanted to go with them, though they were going to the ovens. The grandmothers who took the small children to protect the parents because they knew that they were going anyway. I had a friend later in camp who had a year and a half old child. The grandmother took it, but the father committed suicide in camp. He could not stand it that his mother had perished along with his child. These are such horrible experiences, on that square, one cannot imagine. The human tragedies. The square was huge, it was hot. First they took away the old people who were going to the ovens.

Q: You already knew that they were going to the ovens?

A: Of course, one could see. One could see. It was like three groups of garbage. Then they took the men and then us, the women. My husband stood in the window and shouted to me "Don't worry! This will be over before long. We will meet again before long". And a German hit him on the head with his rifle stock for saying that to me. So they took us away, not in freight cars, but in normal cars. We got out at a station near Oppeln. I do not remember the name of the station now. But I knew that my husband had been unloaded with the other men at the station before. The station was called Blechhammer, now it is called Blachownia, where the men's camp was, in which the men of Strzemieszce were put. They took us further and when we got out of the train a few Polish Jews met us. They told us "We feel very sorry for you". We walked about three kilometers to the camp, which was in the woods. It was a small camp. I do not know who had lived in those barracks before. On the other side there were men's barracks, and those men who had brought us there were trusties, so to speak, in the men's camp.

For the prisoners over there were Jews from France, Holland, Austria. There were no Polish Jews there. I do not know how many of us women there were. Maybe a hundred. I do not remember, I cannot say. There was a shoe factory in the camp. Camp life was set up so that we had roll call at four o'clock. We then went about two kilometers to the shoe factory, Ottmuth, which still exists today. The factory was very modern for those days; we were working for the military, so we mostly made clogs and such things. I worked with an electric saw and sawed wooden soles. I stood there for ten hours at a time. Coming back, I would be very, very tired. After coming back, we got --- No, we ate there. We had what was supposed to be soup, it had not nutrition in it at all. The bread rations were intended to starve us also, absolutely. In the morning they gave us coffee. I realized that they put a sedative in it to pacify us, make us helpless. I, as a pharmacist, noticed this. There was saccharine in it, too, of course. People drank this coffee and swelled up. We could have as much coffee as we wanted, and people would drink and drink and swell up, because they did not give anything else. The bread was just little slices, not even worth mentioning. That was nothing.

Q: So it was just that bread, the coffee, and the soup?

A: Bread and that soup, which was also nothing, nothing, I do not even know what it was.

Q: That was all?

A: Yes. There was water also. Except on Sundays, they would sometimes add one boiled, unpeeled potato. That was Sunday. And people died of hunger. That was why they were called Muslims. But the drinking was the worst of all, because it made one swell up. This was all while we were doing quite strenuous work, because that was _____ and one had to do it. One could not allow oneself not to do it, because that would have been the end.

Q: Where did the term Muslims come from?

A: From the hunger. When I escaped from the camp, I was skin and bone. My ribs were exposed and my hand was also just a bone. And that was why we called them "Muslims". From the starvation. That was unimaginable hunger. I, who did not eat before the war because I wanted to lose weight, said to myself that I would never want to lose weight again. It was very hard there for the Frenchmen. Supposedly they died there in great numbers. They were from the intelligentsia, actors. It was the intelligentsia of Austria, France and Hungary. One of them was our doctor, an Austrian. I do not remember his name now. He had his office with us. We were very close because we spoke German together. When we went out to work, he stayed at the camp. He would eavesdrop on the Germans and find out what was happening and then later tell me what they said. On the other hand, when we were going to the camp, there were Frenchmen who also worked there

who spoke loudly as we passed if they had heard any news. That was how we knew what was happening in the world.

Q: So you had contact with the men's camp?

A: Yes.

Q: And your husband was there?

A: No.

Q: He was in a different camp.

A: He was in Blechhammer.

Q: I misunderstood, I apologize. That was another camp.

A: That was another camp, of course. I contracted typhoid fever in that camp. Typhoid fever would have been the end; the doctor was terrified, so he made me a sort of isolation ward. He sat me by the window, and told me that he had potassium cyanide ready for me in case the Gestapo came. He begged them until they took me for an examination. They took me to Oppeln, to a hospital run by nuns, where they took a blood sample. When I came back, I got jaundice. He was glad, he said "Good, we have jaundice, not typhoid fever. They are afraid of typhoid fever, but they aren't afraid of jaundice. We have jaundice". That made him happy. He did not know how to cure me. He gave me hot and cold poultices to encourage circulation, because I was collapsing. He found insulin somewhere, he stole it from the Germans. He gave me that insulin shot, after which I was exhausted. He ran and stole the sugar bowl from the Germans' table and poured the sugar into my mouth: this saved me. When the answer came, he said "Sorry, I made a mistake. This is jaundice and she feels very well". I was yellow. He told me to act lively as if I felt well. That saved me. That man would then give me his soup, after I recovered. Simple girls from Olkusz would bring me their bread rations on their own so that I could eat. They had known us in Olkusz. We did not know them, but they had known us. They were simple girls from that family, one was even a prostitute. She would come and give me her bread ration. Later, when I began going to work, the two of them would take me under my arms and sing a rhythm to me so I could get there. I do not know whether they lived, I do not know. I had one very nice friend there, a lawyer. Her first name was Regina, I do not remember her last name now. She was an ideal of kindness, but she was very inept in life. She had a very sick heart. She had nothing while I had two coats. I gave her my black winter coat and kept the beige one. Those coats are important. Regina said to me "I cannot do anything. But you escape from here. Run away". I could not take it any longer. I said to myself today or never. I did not know the way, I had no idea how or what. I had no kettle, I did not know what time the trains ran, I knew nothing. I only had a few pennies that I did have.

I decided to escape. I took off at night, of course after tearing off the star sewed to my uniform. They said that the barbed wire was electrified, but I did not believe it and I was right. I snuck through the wires by the building with our bathrooms and showers. There was a moat, a ditch there. I went through and cut my finger open on the wire. I have the scar to this day.

Q: Oy.

A: See it?

Q: Yes. That's a big scar.

A: Yes. To this day. I cut my finger open and went through at night. Suddenly it began to storm and I did not know where to go. I absolutely did not know where the railroad station was. So I ran back, afraid that there would be a roll call and that they would search for me and find me. So I returned to the camp, quickly sewed my star back on, and went to work. But I had come back so that the doctor could bandage my cut in the morning. He did not ask me any questions when I had done it or anything, although it was bleeding like hell. So I went to work. I came home and was summoned by our Judenalteste, Mr. Haubenstein who was from Cracow. It turned out that another prisoner in the bed across from me had noticed that I was gone and reported it to him.

Q: She informed on you/

A: She informed on me. She was from Teschen. The Judenalteste summoned me and asked where I had been during the night. At the same time, it turned out that they had searched my suitcase that I had there. They found my diploma and took it away, there was nothing else in there. I then told him "Sir, something happened to me that does not happen to adults often: my bowels were purged and I was in the bathroom. So then Mr. Haubenstein seeing my freshly bandaged hand, went to the doctor and asked him what had happened. Then that wonderful man, having no idea of what I had been doing, told Haubenstein that the accident had happened at work. When asked if he had logged the injury, the doctor said that he had. Of course he had not, because I had seen him in the morning, not after work. So the doctor saw that something had happened during the night. So Mr. Haubenstein said that I would get my diploma back after the war, he would keep it in his safe until then. After that, they called me "Cat" because I could sneak around. They said "It's March-- look out for the cat". Haubenstein placed another woman who had trouble sleeping at night next to me, Mrs. Flaschenberg, an elderly woman, to watch me so that I could not go sleep. But it turned out that she slept very well. I had contact with Poles, who wore the letter "P". who were doing forced labor there. Because that camp that I was in was a Zwangsarbeitslager. They were doing forced labor, also, and they had to wear "P" insignias. I knew one middle aged Pole from Oppeln and I told him that I wanted to escape, but I did not know which way to go or how far. He told me that

I would have to go about three kilometers and showed me the way. He said that on the next day he would bring a watch and give it to me. Once in a while he would give me bread, once he even brought me an apple. I asked him for a watch. He told me that the train went to Heydebreck, to Katowice, I do not remember when exactly, at around midnight, and that he would bring me a watch so that I could tell approximately when I should take off. I talked all of this over with him, he was a very decent man. I cannot remember his name now, but he looked to be in very bad health at that time, very bad health. I returned to the camp and every night I went to the doctor, on the pretext of getting a massage or something, and he would then tell me in French what had happened in the camp. He then told me that while we were gone the Gestapo had come and said that the camp must be ready to be liquidated within twenty four hours, when they would return. He said to me "Do you know what liquidation means? It means that we are all going to the ovens. Run away if you can". I then went to Regina, who had my black coat, and I said "Give me that black coat, but I don't have anything to give you. Because I have to make a dummy so that it looks as if I am in bed. So that the one on the upper bunk does not notice that I am gone again". She said "Listen. As soon as you can, if you have the strength, run away. Don't worry about me. When the war ends, I will get your diploma for you from Haubenstock's safe". I then went to another friend, Wuertzel, who had been in Klucze with me, from the other Jewish family. I told her that I was running away that night and we said good-bye. Then I went to the doctor and I said to him "If you can, you run away, too". I will help you afterwards, because people will help me". I believed that people would help me. "We will help you also". He said "I cannot. I cannot leave my patients. I will not leave them here alone I will go on with them". Practically everyone was sick by then. We said good-bye, I made a dummy. I did not have a watch, because I was leaving that night, and the man was to give it to me the next day. I did not have a watch. But he had told me approximately how many kilometers I should go and in which direction. That was a Saturday night. The Easter holiday was a week from the next day. I cannot say what the exact date was, but I know that it was a week before the Polish Easter holiday, because it was what was called "Palm Sunday". I walked in that black coat at night and German patrols went by and shone their flashlights on me. I did nothing, I did not hide. I walked bravely, because after all there were other people going to the train as well, it was a Saturday night. Normal workers. No one stopped me. Only once, I saw a patrol coming in the distance and my nerve broke and I hid in a corner. But they went past and I reached the railroad station. I do not remember the name of the station right now, "Gogolin" maybe. It was dark at the station because the so-called "Verdunklung", that is black-out against bombing, was in effect. So it was completely dark. But just before the train came, when the ticket window opened, a light came on. It then turned out that our "Aufseherin", or overseer, was there, too, next to me. She was a German -- not a German but a Silesian, she spoke Polish very well. She was engaged to my boss at the factory, a terrible hakatysta.

Q: A what?

A: Hakatysta, a Nazi. She was his fiancée. She was with a group of her colleagues and she looked at me. I was looking at the price list and timetable by the ticket window. She looked at me and I recognized her and went up to her. I was terrified, I thought “What will I do?” I pretended to look at the timetable and then turned and went to her. I asked her to step to one side and said “Yes, it’s me. But I must say that if you betray me, I will be subject to the death penalty. Now choose”. But she said “What are you talking about, you will ride with us!” Kern will be furious on Monday”. Because I was his best worker, you understand. “He will be furious”. We boarded the train and she asked me where I was going. I said Sosnowiec, because that was where I wanted to go, I wanted to go to Sosnowiec. They gave me a roll with ham right away, the first one I had eaten. I consumed it so quickly that another of them gave me his toll with ham as well. And we were on our way. I was quaking in my shoes, despite everything. I did not trust them. We were in Heydebreck, now Kedzierzyn. The train stopped at the station there for three hours, I do not know why, it was supposed to keep going. I realized that it was time for roll-call, and that I had been discovered missing. I was very nervous while that train stood there, it was a horrible time for me. I realized that all they would have to do is call ahead to the station and it would be all over for me. So we continued to Katowice. There was a lot of activity in Katowice, people getting in and out, and I got off too. I got away from her and mingled with the crowd instead of going to Sosnowiec. I got off at Katowice. In Katowice there was a Silesian, a Reichsdeutch, who worked as a caretaker. I knew where he lived. He was an elderly man, I think a teacher. His name was Nowak and he had two daughters. I had to stop somewhere to rest a little and to change clothes because I was in a black kerchief and the black coat and I looked very conspicuous on that Palm Sunday holiday. I came to them; they were terrified and I do not blame them. I said to them “I don’t want to stay here, but could you give me a hat and some clothes so I can look like a human being. I’ll just have some coffee and leave”. And that was what I did. They gave me the things, and I can say that they were very decent, because even though they were very scared, they would have let me stay if I had wanted to. But I did not have the courage to ask. They were decent people and I could not endanger them that way. From Katowice I took the streetcar to Dabrowa Gornicza.

Q: Why there?

A: I was heading back to Strzemieszyce. I had no choice. I do not remember exactly, but I think I got out in Sosnowiec, because I kept pausing on the way. Let us go back a little in the story. My husband Henryk, or Rysiek, who was in the Blechhammer camp, found out that I had typhoid fever, that I was sick, I do not know how. He did it through a Gestapo man, I do not know what he promised him or what, but he got along with people very well. So the Gestapo man, who was from Sosnowiec, got a letter to me from my husband. It said that he had gotten a diamond ring from our friends in Klucze and that the Gestapo man had it and would give it to me, maybe I could bribe someone with it. I never used it, it

disappeared, but I had the Gestapo man's address and I wrote him a letter telling him to tell my husband that I was on the way, that I was healthy, lively and whole, that I was on the way, and that I would get in touch with him. This was useful, because there was a roll call, I think in all the camps, but definitely in Blechhammer. I know from people who were there with my husband. There was a roll call at which it was announced that Matylda Szejda had escaped from camp and been captured and shot. At this moment, everyone looked at my husband and were mystified because Rysiek was laughing. He was laughing. So he told them that he knew that I was alive and that I was on my way. If it had not been for that Gestapo man -- I do not know if he was in the Gestapo or not, to us they were all Gestapo men, but anyway he was a German who helped. I cannot remember exactly --- In Sosnowiec I know I had an acquaintance, a woman I knew slightly, and I wanted to go to her simply to use the bathroom, because there was nowhere else to do it. I came to her door and rang. When she saw me she would not let me through the threshold. She was so scared. She said "You must go away immediately, the Gestapo took my brother away today". It is possible. It is possible. Maybe she was concerned for me as well. It is possible. I told her "You do not even know what I want from you and you won't let me in the door. I just wanted to use the bathroom". And I left, and I went by some wall. Then I went to Dabrowa Gornicza and walked to Strzemieszyce from there because there was no connection. I got to Strzemieszyce and did not know where to go. I decided to go to the director, Korona, whom my husband had helped. He used to tell us everything that went on, that the Germans had talked about. They had given him a villa on the outskirts of Strzemieszyce. I decided to go there. It was evening, fairly late, around nine o'clock. Everything was lit up in the house, all of the windows. But I had no choice. I rang and their little boy came out, who was four years old then. His name was Piotrus. Piotrus because the engineer Lipczyk who had done so much for the Jews was named Piotr. Korona named his child Piotrus. Piotrus opened the door for me, he recognized me, I signaled to him and told him to go to get his mother. She came and immediately took me aside to another room and told me "The whole NSDAP is here!" She shut me in another room. Later they went off after a night of drinking, it was probably around midnight. Romus, Romus Korona, came in completely drunk and started saying "I'm so happy that you're here, I'm so happy that you made it, if anyone comes in here I'll kill them". And he pulls out his Browning. I said "You'd better give me that Browning". And I took it and slept with it. I had the Browning, not he. He was completely besotted. God really looked out for me, he watched over me the whole time. He went to work in the morning and luckily for me, broke his leg. He lay in the next room, not knowing that I was there. At first, his wife had said "You can't trust him. He is the worst kind of snake". She hid me in the pantry. I lived in the pantry. The first thing he said when he got back from the factory was "What's happening with Madzia?" She told him "She left, she's not here anymore". He had to lay there with a complicated fracture and he had no idea that I was right there. Mrs. Korona, a Silesian, gave me a few options. I later regretted not taking her up on them. She said that I could take her papers and go to Germany and France and to Switzerland, and to cross the border

there, through the Tyrols or the Austrian Alps maybe. But I did not have the courage. I was exhausted, penniless, I did not have the courage. I thought that I would go back to Poland. She told me that all my jewelry left behind in Klucze had been brought for me by those workers from Klucze. They brought it for me so that I would have it. There was a bracelet, for the engagement from my first marriage, that my daughter has today. They brought it for me so that I could have some possibilities, because I had nothing, not a penny nothing. And to pay someone to take me across the border. The Polish border. Her cleaning lady was the teacher of the local elementary school and she asked her for help. She found a boy, maybe twelve years old. I do not know if he knew that I was Jewish. He said that he would take the train with me, in separate wagons of course. This was all for the money that I had gotten for the jewelry, it was not much. He would go with me and show me where to cross the border. And she said that she would give me her Ausweis, and she was a Reichsdeutsch and that I would send it to her when I reached Cracow. So we took the train, separately. I do not remember ---. I know that we crossed in Andrychow, but I do not know if the train went all the way to Andrychow or not. The border was in Andrychow. He went ahead and I followed, an unremarkable little boy. At one point he said to me "There are police, gendarmes, on the left here. I will not go any further. But if you just keep going, the border is there". I went by the gendarmes by myself and kept going. Then I came to a crossroads and some woman, a Pole asked me "Where are you going?" I said "There". She said "There's been shooting there since morning, it's no place to go". I asked if there was another way. She asked me if I could swim and I said that I could. She said that the only other way was a swamp neck deep. And I went that way, and I was up to my neck in mud. But they did not keep watch over there, because they thought that no one would dare to go through that swamp. When I reached the Polish side, the people in the first house in the village there immediately took all my clothes and washed the mud off. I said that I wanted to go to Cracow and they told me to go down to Krzeszowice Station. I said "All right". Why was I going to Cracow? I was going to Cracow because in Klucze we had a very nice friend who was an elementary school teacher in Klucze. During the war, the school stayed open and she still was paid. She supported us. She earned pennies, but she always shared with us. She asked what I would need most if I ended up outside of the country; she would take it and smuggle it to her sister. She took my dresses, my pajamas, two blankets, and other things for everyday life, so that I could begin life. She told me "Remember that if you are ever in need you can come to my sister. She is Anna Kruczkowska and she will always help you". I later found out that the sister gave the things to her sister-in-law, an old maid and also a teacher, and she said to me "As long as the house does not burn down, your things will always be there, because she is not involved with anything and she is a good person, and unless the house burns down your things will always be there". So I was going to Anna Kruczkowska. I went to Krzeszowice. There are mountains, and when I came down from the mountainside, it was already six o'clock. A crows of people was waiting and there was no train. At eight o'clock it would be curfew in Cracow. My Ausweis was useless in the Government. The Ausweis was for Germany only, so I had no

papers at all. So I had no idea what to do. A simple person was sitting next to me, I did not know who he was. It turned out he was a guard, he watched the offices and barracks on the tracks there. I had the bracelet high on my arm, on that stick of an arm. I had nothing else, I think. I do not remember. He said to me "Ma'am, you shouldn't go to Cracow. In Cracow they will ask for identification at the train station" ---he knew, people could tell who one was -- "they will ask for identification and arrest you, it's curfew. What will you do then? If you want, I can put you up in the barracks here. I am the night watchman. You can spend the night here". I agreed, I had no choice. I went with him for a ways from the train station along the tracks to that barracks. There was a young _____ boy there and the watchman told him "You go but some sausages so the lady can eat, and some vodka so she can have a drink, and a piece of bread". I was terrified because I could see what was happening. I told him "You know, I am completely drunk after one glass of vodka". But that was not true. I drank well in those days. Except I do not know about then, because I was starved, but before that I could drink well and still have a clear head. He drank and ate much, I very little. I gave the boy some money for the dinner, because I had money. Then the watchman told the boy to leave. He said to me "Don't try to leave. There are Bahnschutz here and if they see any one on the tracks they shoot. You must wait until morning. What were you doing there?" I said that I had gone to buy eggs out there but they were too expensive, so that was why I still had that money. He said "Yeah, I believe in those eggs". Anyway, he tried to get at me. I told him "You know, you have to work in the morning and I do not. Why don't you lie down on that desk" --- that was the only place one could sleep in there -- and I will sit in the chair". And so I did. I sat down in the chair and he went to sleep. He was drunk. I had let him drink until he was drunk and fell asleep. It began to _____ and he opened the door and left. I was afraid that he was going to get someone. Maybe he went to the bathroom or something, but anyway people were going to the station along the tracks and I took off. I am at the station and I am waiting in a crowd for the train. They come and begin checking papers. They checked on the right, they checked on the left, but they did not check me in the middle. So I got to Cracow to Mrs. Anna Kruczkowska. I came in the morning about nine o'clock. It was the first train. I come to her house and open the door. I said "My name is Madzia Szejn". She said "Oh, come in, how nice to meet you, please". I told her "I must warn you that there is a price on my head and that I do not want to put you in any danger. I just want to wash and to eat something and leave". I knew some other people in Cracow, the factory director from Klucze, and I wanted to go to them, and just maybe get my things from her. She only had one room and a kitchen. She had a child, four years old just like Benedykt. Her husband has been taken away, he was executed in Auschwitz as a socialist. She was a socialist also. She said to me "I am here to help people". She gave me fresh bedding, let me wash myself, _____, she gave me coffee and set food on the table and said "I am going out with the child. You sleep here as long as you like". And when she came back before curfew, she said "Now you cannot leave, you must stay here". For two weeks she did not even let me out of the house, not even to see my friends, because of the

way that I looked, until I began to look like a human being. She sold one of the wool blankets for me so that I would have some money. She also fed me. She gave me everything. They began making me Kennkarten. But those Kennkarten were obviously forged. She would put them in the fire and tell me today your name is so-and-so and tomorrow your name will be so-and-so. She told the neighbors that I was her cousin from Lvov. That small four year old Marek was as scared of green uniforms as I was because they had taken his father away with screaming and violence. When we were walking and saw a green uniform, we both shook. But that child was extraordinary because when the neighbor would come to the door and ask for me, he would come into the dark room and signal me to be quiet, that I was not home. I did not want to endanger them. As soon as I got in touch with my family in Warsaw and they told me to go there, I went. I was with her for three months, and I am alive thanks to her. She died. Her son, is still alive, and I am still Auntie, just as I used to be, and he takes care of me in Poland. He is very close to me. She was also very close and sincere. I have nominated her for the Righteous Among Nations.

Q: Yad Vashem.

A: Yes. Yes. I nominated her. Because she deserves it. Because thanks to her, I am alive. Disinterestedly, completely disinterestedly. Her brother-in-law, her sister's husband, worked in the AK. He made me Kennkarten. Those were Kennkarten of real women who are alive, not fictional ones. You understand? Two of the same women existed that way. He was in the AK and he even worked in the police for the AK. He took me on the streetcar to the train, "Nur fuer Deutsche", you know, and so I went to Warsaw. I came to Warsaw and found my mother-in-law, whom I knew existed, I knew of a mother-in-law and a sister-in-law, but I did not know where they lived. Those were interesting coincidences, because there were decent Germans and there were other Germans that were not decent. I found them through one of those decent Germans. From her house I wrote to an aunt of my first husband. I knew that she worked in a certain factory and I wrote to her at that factory. It turned out that she had not worked there for a long time, but the director felt somehow that it was a very important letter. My sister-in-law had taken my aunt's job and the director gave her the letter. She then found out that I was free and that I was here. She immediately wrote back urging me to come to Warsaw. In Warsaw there was a terrible stir over my escape from camp. It was too loud. All the people from Lvov were there and whom I had known would stop me on the street. It was too much. I was afraid. It became so well known. I spent the first night in an AK house. There was a radio transmitter in the basement and so on. A married couple were living in the loft. They had to go into hiding because he was German and she was Jewish. I lived there with them in their room, and people would come to me there to interview me. I wrote those statements then. Aniela Steinsberg took care of me then. She was the one who brought me there, it all happened through her. Then I knew where all the camps were. Those were little sub camps. I knew how many Jews approximately were in them, back then I was interested in that sort of thing. Those reports were

supposed to go to London. I think that they were sent, because emissaries came with money. But money was of no use anymore. This was already 1944, almost the end of the war.

Q: But before the Uprising?

A: All of this was before the Uprising. I wrote to my husband then and told him that I would try to get him out somehow. I was with that couple for a few days, then Mrs. Wittlin. I do not remember her first name, she also worked for the organization and knew me, took me to her apartment. She did not look Jewish either. She rented a room from a lawyer, who certainly knew about me. She asked him if I could stay for a few days and he agreed. I hid there and then Mrs. Steinsburg acquired a new Kennkarte for me. They said that the ones I had been using were of very low quality. They gave me a Kennkarte of a person who had applied for one and never picked it up. My name was Zofia Knapik. They sent me as Zofia Knapik to a socialist family, the Malinowskis, also Cracow socialists. Stanislaw, I think, Malinowski was a lawyer in Warsaw who had a Jewish wife. They escaped and were here later. I do not know if they are alive or not. Many people escaped from the Ghetto through that apartment. His sister lived there. She was paralyzed, young but completely paralyzed. Very intelligent, but all she could do was eat. One had to wheel her on a wheelchair, she was paralyzed. I think from poliomyelitis, I do not know.. the other sister, Lina Morawska, a doctor, lived elsewhere and she supported her sister in that apartment. It was a good arrangement for all of us. I had a place to live, the other sister brought food for both of us, and I took care of the paralyzed girl. Then Zegota found me. The husband of one of my school friends from Strzalkowska worked for Zegota and he brought me money. I then went out and bought a cloak and a pair of clogs so I had something to go out in. I must say that they really helped me -- people helped me very much. I lived there with Wanda Malinowska. She did not even know, but many people were hiding there. It was a large apartment and she was immobile, so people from Lublin would come and hide there and she knew nothing of it. Her sister or brother-in-law probably sent them there, I do not know who. Various things went on in that apartment. I went places with her and it was all right. Even if one had to transport some weapons, it was fine. She would just sit on it and not feel anything. She had no idea what was going on. This was the period before the Uprising. I told the sister that when the Uprising broke out that I would go and join the action. I would not stay with her, but go. The sister said that she understood. When the Uprising broke out, I took Wanda down to the basement after the first bombardment. This was on Krucza Street in the center of the city. I took her down to the basement. I made her a bed where unfortunately -- the lower part of the body was loose because there was no way to launder the diapers and so on, there was no water. There was a pail there for her to relieve herself into. I took her to the shelter in the basement, and the third floor where we lived was blown to pieces eventually. She was in the basement. I went to Hoza, to the hospital nearby and reported for work as a nurse. I was accepted with open arms. I would cross from that house to the hospital by walls. I saw horrible

things during the Uprising. I was literally up to my ankles in blood in the hospital. I saw horrible things. And I saw how the small children fought and the small children carried the mail and news and so on. I saw Jews, too, who took great satisfaction in executing captured Germans. They were given to them: "Here, he's yours, you deserve him. Have that satisfaction". When the Uprising collapsed, we had to leave that building as quickly as possible. There were a wall and a garden there. Only the first floor was left of the hospital. They hacked away at it. We moved to Wilcza, then to Wspolna, to another hospital. But we had to get away from there because there were a great deal of Germans that had been shot there. Not patients.

Q: There were German patients?

A: Yes, yes. I carried them out myself. When the Uprising ended, we carried them out. But those patients would tell the Germans that we had taken good care of them as we brought them out --- because, you know, a wounded man is just a wounded man. They are all the same. They shot the ones who hid in attics and shot at people. One would be walking down the street and suddenly, no one knows where from, one gets a bullet in the head. They hid behind windows and crevices and shot at people. They were not regular soldiers, they were some kind of storming parties. They did not fight normally like the army. I remember that we even shared cigarettes equally with the German patients when some cigarettes turned up once. Apropos of cigarettes, I was a smoker then. In camp I smoked dry leaves off of trees rolled up in any piece of paper that I came across. Once the Lagerfuhrer hit me in the face because the one who handed the soup out knew that I smoked and had given me a cigarette. I was hit in the face for that. I would smoke that foulness in the lavatory and I swore that after the war I would have my own silver cigarette case and I would smoke as much as I wanted to. And I did. Then the Uprising fell. That was horrible, awful. I went around with another friend and we would break open apartments because they were full of howling dogs left behind by people. We let them out. The truth is that I was constantly inebriated at that time. We would go through those apartments and I would find some cherry vodka and drink it. We ate almost nothing then, during the Uprising, just "spit" gruel.

Q: What sort of gruel?

A: "Spit" gruel. It was not cooked, so one had to spit. It was brought from across the Vistula, from Praga, so we did not starve.

Q: It was from the People's Army? From the Soviet Army?

A: Yes, they stood there. Berling stood there. But they did not let Berling move. They retreated. They did that too.

Q: Yes.

A: But there were drops from _____ [Side III – 99] and through the first three or four days of the Uprising, all of the newspapers, all of the people, were so full of enthusiasm, everyone went together, no one informed on anyone else. On the contrary, the enthusiasm was amazing. That unfortunately began to end later. When the Uprising fell, the commander of our hospital decided to move elsewhere as quickly as possible. To leave that place. Then Wanda's sister came – Wanda of course survived everything down in that basement – and took her to Cracow. In Cracow the one and only bomb to fall on that city in 1945 hit their apartment and she was killed.. These are the ways of human destiny. I went with all the others to Poznanska, to another hospital in a completely different district. The Germans began evacuating people. What I saw cannot be described. They burned out whole buildings, they threw grenades into basements if anyone was still hiding there. I remember that when I was carrying someone to the German side I heard Spielmann playing Chopin's revolutionary Etude on the piano. It resounded amidst all of that tragedy. I was walking barefoot and bloody, it was all simply uncanny. I carried an actor once, with whom I was in camp later. His name was Mieczyslaw Milecki. He died last year, I think. Very nice man, a great person. He was in the camp with me later. He was actually from Vilna, from the Vilna Theater. He was seriously wounded, his legs and lungs were all shot up. When we brought him to that little hospital, the Hospital of the Infant Jesus, it was so crowded there that people were lying in the hallways. Does this interest the Museum?

Q: Yes, everything interests the Museum.

A: It was dark and suddenly we hear a voice "Mietek, is that you?" I look and it is Solski. Your father will know who Solski was. He was one of the most famous Polish actors. He lived to be a hundred years old. Ludwik Solski. "Mietk, is that you? Give me some bread". He was there with his ward. I had some bread crusts in my pocket. The Russians had dropped supplies there near the hospital during the night. The People's Army and the Home Army started arguing over it. The former were saying "It is Russian so it is ours", the latter were saying "It is ammunition so it is ours". Our commander was very wise and he said "Listen, these are hospital grounds. If it is food let it go to the hospital, because we have both kinds here, we have everyone'. And everyone agreed. It turned out to be cases full of bread crusts. I had some in my pocket and I gave them some. After the war, after Mietek and I came back from the camp, we met Solski in Cracow and he said "You saved my life with that bread that day".

Q: So he lived to be a hundred thanks to you.

A: Yes, yes. Then he looked, actually he always looked, because he was small, as if he were already near death, but he looked terribly then. So we were in that other hospital and we were waiting to be evacuated with the wounded. They said that they could only evacuate us after we took the barricade down. They told us to

take apart the barricade. So I took my colleague aside and said “So I’m supposed to take apart a barricade? I’m supposed to be able to tear down a barricade?” I had two Austrians there and they said “We’ll do it for you. You do nothing. Just look out and whistle if the Germans are coming.” And they actually took the barricade down instead of us. I was slightly tipsy then or I would not have dared to be as bold as I was. He said to me “You know that you’re going to a camp, don’t you?” I said “I know, I love camps”. He says “Do you have anything to wear?” I said “No, you see what I have.” I was wearing a blood stained summer dress and shoes that did not even stay on my feet anymore. He said “You can’t go that way, you’ll be spending the winter there!” I said “So I can’t go, what can I do?” He said “Sit here and wait.” I said “I won’t wait.” “What’s your name?” I said Zofia, Sister Zofia. “Schwester Sophie?” “Yes”. So, imagine this, that evening about nine or ten, I am told that some Germans have come looking for “Schwester Sophie”. They brought two suitcases of things and told me to try them on to see if they fit me. I took those suitcases with me to the second camp. That was Stalag IVB, Zeithain. Zeithain Kreis Muehlberg. Zeithain near Muehlberg, in Saxony. With the wounded.

Q: But you were not wounded?

A: No, no. It turned out later that I had been wounded and I have a scar on my head to this day. I had a piece of shrapnel in my head that I did not know about and I walked around with it until one night my head hurt so badly that I could not even touch my hair. So I went to our doctor on duty and asked him “Please look and see what I have in my head that makes it hurt so.” He said “what do you mean, you have a piece of shrapnel! We have to take it out!” And he took it out then. But he evidently did not take all of it out because later it became encysted. I did not even know that I had a piece of shrapnel in my head. One had no time to think. We went to that second camp. Compared to the first one, it was like heaven for me. I felt like a human being there, although it was a camp, a prisoner of war camp. It was run more or less by the Geneva Convention. Prisoners of war counted for something, the Germans were more careful then, this was not a camp for Jews. It was not even comparable. Although there were shootings sometimes. One of my fellow prisoners was wounded. They shot from the guard towers at night. She was wounded on the top bunk. It happened. One could not walk from barracks to barracks at night, one could get it that way too. Yet the atmosphere was different. We saw that they were losing. We told ourselves that we will do nothing to them, for they are losing, and it was madly satisfying.

Q: You were posing as a Pole, right?

A: Yes, yes, yes. There were Italians and Russian prisoners of war camps also. They treated the Russians horribly, horribly. It was inhuman. They gave them nothing. They died like flies. There were mass executions of them, too. Despite everything, they were very well organized. When the war was ending and the Germans were running away to the Americans to surrender because they were

very afraid of the approaching Russian army. This was near the Elbe and they were very afraid of them. They even announced that anyone who wanted to run away with them could. Of course no one went, but anyway the Russian prisoners watched them and when they ran away at night they caught up to them and set the whole car on fire and killed them all, the whole German camp crew. They knew what they were doing. Later the evacuation of the camp began. I returned to Poland in a terrible state of mind, because I realized that I was left alone, that I have no one left. No parents, nobody, no husband. What was I going back to? Why was I going back? I led a group of wounded home, I was supposed to go back for a second group, but we were attacked by Russian soldiers at one of the stations and they took everything we had. Luckily, I again had the bracelet high up here. They took everything we had. We were left without identification papers, or anything. Milecki wanted to go after them, so they shot at us a little. They asked for (illegible). We said "Where would we have (illegible)? We're coming from a camp".

Q: Wristwatches?

A: Wristwatches, yes. That post-war period was awful. Those hoodlum soldiers what they later did to those Germans, it was horrible. The Germans were running, crossing the Elbe, and we sat in the guard towers and shouted "Deutschland siegt in allen Fronten!" as they ran away as we did in 1939. It was a great satisfaction. They half drowned and paddled to get to the American side. On that side the Germans were treated completely differently than on this one. As if that were not enough, if a Pole was riding a bicycle on that side, the Americans would take it away. That was the way it was.

Q: For what reason?

A: I do not know. "Because it is not yours and you have it." I suppose that was it. "It's stolen. Where do you have it from?" I returned to Poland and began searching. I went back to Mrs. Kruczkowska of course. Her son Marek was not in Cracow at the time. He was on vacation for two months. When he came home he said "Auntie, I prayed for you for two extra months for nothing." He had thought that I was still in camp. She sent me packages to the camp although she had nothing herself. But that was necessary, you know, because it was the only way to get onions and so on. I had terrible scurvy. In general I was wasted and starved after all that. Those five years, including those two camps, were very hard. It all had it's effect later. I came back and found out that my husband had most probably died at the very end in Gros Rosen.

Q: In Gros Rosen?

A: Yes. They were evacuated from Blechhammer, on foot of course. I do not remember where they went first, but he had frostbitten toes and the doctor thought that he should stay in the infirmary at Gros Rosen. I later spoke with the doctor. I

do not know if he was telling the truth, or whether he remembered or not, but his name was given to me, Dr. Michalowski. I went to him from Warsaw. He said "Ma'am, we thought that maybe they would evacuate the infirmary in some other way. He could not walk with those frostbitten feet. But they took them and shot them all at the last minute". So I was left alone. Without a goal, without anything. I considered suicide then myself. I did not see a reason to live. Mrs. Kruczkowska helped me very much then. She told me "People like you are needed. You must stay, you must stay here." She did not even want me to leave the country. "There is so much work to do here." She was a great patriot. "You must stay, you must do this and that, there is no point in giving up". That helped me very much in my thinking. I found my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law. We are still very close to this day. My husband's, Henryk Schnejd's, cousin, Jana Prot. I made my decision. There was a family that had been friends with my parents. My present ---second husband's mother. I knew him from childhood also, we had played together and so on. He was a bachelor and he had survived along with his mother. His name before the war was Miller, Feliks Miller. He lived through horrible things, too, horrible things. They had their effect on his nerves. They had a great effect. So that he had enough of everything. Not long ago. Five years ago.

Q: I'm sorry.

A: A victim of the war. Another victim of the war.

Q: Yes.

A: He lost his father, he lost his sister, he lost his brother-in-law, he lost everyone. A friend helped him and his mother get out. He worked on the railroad as a fireman's assistant. He went through doctor's examinations, imagine that, he had to go to doctor's examinations. He sat bravely, but they did not make him undress completely. He worked at the roundhouse in Pruszkow and he survived that way. We began a family together. Our first child died. It lived three days. I was very weak, my heart. The doctors did not even know whether to maintain the pregnancy or not. But I wanted to, although I was very weak. The baby died of embryocardia. That was a terrible blow. I became pregnant again and bore Joanna, my only daughter, our only daughter. She is a wonderful daughter.

Q: You have wonderful grandsons, too.

A: Yes, they are very nice. Very kind. Because to me kindness is the most important thing in people. Nothing but kindness is important. I can say that throughout all that terrible unhappiness I had much luck. Evidently erroneousness wanted me to live through those twists of destiny. I still dream about my escape at night. Consciously I can simply talk about it, you know, because it is like a different person or something. But at night it all comes out in my subconsciousness. There was a long period of time when in my third floor

apartment window in Cracow there always stood a vase or something because there were moment when I was subconsciously escaping and I would open the window. I could have fallen out or something, there were moments like that. Later o after the war in 1949 I was in an UB jail, too. I had that pleasure as well. All of this --- thank God that it is as it is. But I have lived through my share.

Q: Do you remember the liberation of that camp, of the Stalag?

A: It was never liberated, it was eliminated.

Q: It wasn't liberated?

A: It was eliminated.

Q: They just left it behind?

A: They took them, I do not know what camp they took them to. But I have only met Mrs. Wuertzel from that camp after the war, and she died soon after. I cannot remember where they put them. The camp was eliminated just as the Gestapo told the doctor then. Oh, and I found the doctor after the war.

Q: He lived?

A: He lived. I found him in Vienna. I cannot remember his name now. That was about 1950. A friend found him in a directory of practicing physicians. He was practicing. She gave him a message from me and he sent me his picture and his business card and he very much wanted me to come to see him in Vienna. But he died very soon after. Before I could go there, after all it was difficult to get out, he got uremia, his kidneys were torn apart after all that. He had a great practice, because he was an excellent doctor and an excellent person, he died very quickly. So I never saw him. But that camp was not liberated. It was eliminated.

Q: I understand.

A: Because those were all sub camps of Auschwitz. I think there were very many of those. But it was called Zwangsarbeitslager because the prisoners worked for no pay. In Auschwitz they did not work. That was the difference.

Q: And the second camp, after the Uprising, the Stalag?

A: Yes, Stalag IVB. That was freed by the Russians. The American and the Russian armies met near there, near Torto.

Q: Do you remember the date of the liberation?

A: The Germans escaped on the 20th or 21st of April. There was no one for two days and the war went through our camp. Then the Russians came on the 23rd or 24th. Something like that. A group of Jewish women who had been liberated and were coming back to Poland came through also. I do not know which camp they were from. It was freed by Major Reohteb. It was a hospital, but he gave us orders. He was afraid. He said he was afraid that he would let us go and we would disappear and then anything could happen to us. That camp, as a hospital, went to Torun. The Polish commander of that hospital was Major Sztrajch. I was there as Zofia Knapik. I was well known because with Milecki and another man, Karpinski, a director, we had started a camp theater. Of course our plays had one meaning for the Germans and one for the Poles. It helped to keep our spirits up. In the other camp I also organized a theater. The Germans allowed this. There were wonderful French actors there. They would do little skits of mimicry through the fence.

Q: We also wanted to know if you remember any incidents of anti-Semitism before the war.

A: You know, there was anti-Semitism. I was on the bus or the train. There was a Jew there, one of those bearded ones with peyes. People were making comments about him and when I said "What do you want from this man? Christ was also a Jew, so what do you want?" Then they said "Oh, so you must be Jewish also." There were incidents like that. But in the circles that I moved in, I never met with anti-Semitism. I knew about the pogroms, but ---- Wait. In Lvov there were fights between fraternities. Law students would go to the medical school and medical students would go to the law school, so that colleagues would not be beating each other. I never looked Jewish, so I told a friend "Tadek, come on, I'll take you out of here." I took his arm and led him out and there was no problem. But my professor, whom they knew to be a Jew, Biber-Bobrzanski, a great professor, had to escape through the bathroom.

Q: A professor had to run away through the bathroom?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: That's terrible.

A: It happened. One cannot say that it was not like that. There were such things. And there was numerous nullus, too, where they accepted no Jews to the medical school. Numerous nullus and numerous clauses. It all happened. I remember I had a classmate ---- It is not recording now, is it?

Q: Yes, it is.

A: It is? She is no longer living. This was a friend who was there. She did not tell on me and on the boy I was leading out, but she told them "There's more of them,

hold on.” It was the professor that was still in there, the one who had to escape. I never spoke to her after that and she knew why. I met her after the war and we never spoke either. We were in different circles. Those were young people in the _____ party. What was the abbreviation for ---- They were nationalists.

Q: ND's?

A: No, not ND's. Nationalists. It was very interesting. ND's helped very much.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. My friend who had the husband who was in Zegota, her father was the President of the National Democrats in Lvov. Her father helped and settled Jews in Laski. Later he was President of the RGO and he helped Jews very much. The ideal and the practice are two different things. That was something terrible to the ND people. Something not to be allowed. They cannot be compared with our Nationalists today. When I heard about how many people he had helped, that girl's father, with whom I was very close after the war ---- I was very close to her as well. To this day she is my closest friend. Her husband unfortunately died last year. He was in Zegota. They all worked together, took care of me, paid the rent, everything.

Q: Could you repeat what you said earlier about the extent of assimilation in your family?

A: I was not aware of such things then. Things were the way they were and that was it. Part of the family was even baptized. One did not think about it, one accepted it. It was not important to us. I cannot even say for sure what my father's name was. To us he was Grandpa. If he had a name, I, as a little child, was not interested. That was the way it was, that was how I was raised.

Q: Speaking Polish and educated?

A: Yes. We all lived in great friendship. As I said, we all lived in great friendship. They quarreled and fought because some had these views and some others, but everyone loved each other very much all the same. My father did not do badly for himself, and he supported my mother's five brothers and their families. That is all.

Q: All right. To finish, we wanted to ask you if there were any other incidents or events that made an impression on you that you have not told us about yet.

A: From the Occupation?

Q: Yes.

A: That whole camp was awful, that point, the deportation of the Jews, those were terrible matters. The Jewish gendarmes catching people and putting them in basements to be deported. Those were awful things. Those were things that I do not want to talk about, that I do not want to remember. Those were nightmares, something nightmarish. I went to Jerusalem. Not in the big museum of martyrdom, because I could not go in there. I said, "I lived through this, let the people who did not live through this go there." I did not go to Auschwitz either. After all those camps, I did not want to -----Wait, I did go on an excursion with my daughter to the area where my camp had been. The excursion went around that part of the country, you know, to Oppeln and so on. There was a restaurant across from the old place. The camp had been in the woods. The woods were still there, and the ditches and the graves. Children were sitting there, women were playing with children ----- You know, I started to cry. My daughter pulled me away and said "Leave it, that's enough." And, you know, I did not go to those places, I did not want to hear about them, I did not want to read about them, I did not want to know about them. A very nice man that I met showed me Jerusalem, because my friend lived in Haifa and her husband was sick so she could not take me there. He took me to a newly built museum, near King David. There are signs in these old catacombs and each one says in Hebrew or in Polish how many Jews died in each place/The names of the towns and villages. This was all new, four years ago. The man whom I was with said that he had never been there before. We went in and there was a sort of catafalque with a pall standing there and an eternal flame. The Swedish couples came in and you know, they were more moved than I was. Really. There were also display cases of items of what was left of the Jews. There were burned prayer shawls, burned and destroyed things. There was also a huge painting of children -- I will never forget that. I will never forget the children at the point either -- crying, being driven to the gas chamber. It was supposedly done from German photographs, you know. I ran away from there. I could not do it. Those are things that I cannot do. I do not know. I cannot listen to that, I cannot read about that, nothing. Nothing from the war period.

Q: I'm not surprised.

A: Once I decide to tell someone about it, I try to do it with a certain distance. Do not think that I have not take a sedative today. But I am excited anyway. Sometimes I think to myself "My God, I lived through all of that. I did all of that." I used to tell my daughter "You are having such a hard time." She studied in Poland and it was difficult, and in this country it was hard for her at first. We were in difficult circumstances. Two people with higher education, one daughter, it was not easy. But we had no debts and we did no shady dealings. It was hard for us. She said "It was harder for you when you were my age. You lived through much worse when you were my age." She appreciates it very much. If you have any other questions ---- I do not know what to write here, so many experiences, tell me what I should write in these few lines.

Q: Yes.

A: Will you be translating this?

Q: Yes, almost certainly.

A: You will be translating this. Poor you.

Q: Why poor me?

A: It is so long.

Q: But it's very interesting.

A: I will tell you ---- I do not know if you have another story like this one. I do not think you do.

Q: I do not think we do either.

A: I do not think you do. The sensation that I caused in Warsaw ---- it literally scared me, it was so great. I was instructed not to acknowledge people I knew on the street. Friends would come up to me in the street and say "I heard you were free!" and I would say : "I don't know you." I was scared. I trusted no one. Later I heard that there had been cases when the Germans found out about things like that. The day the Uprising broke out, I was supposed to go meet all my old friends from Lvov. They were waiting, happy that they could finally see me. Fortunately, the Uprising broke out. I did not know what to do before it broke out; they told me "Go ahead, we'll be downstairs watching the door. We'll see what's happening." People feared one another. But I think that there are few such stories.

Q: Definitely not. One last question, if I may.

A: Yes.

Q: You said that your second husband's name was ----

A: Felike Miller.

Q: Right.

A: And that is why the older boy is named Felek.

Q: Feliks and Benio.

A: Yes. And I had nothing to do with it. My daughter named them on her own.

Q: I like the name Feliks.

A: But he was not Felix, he was not happy.

Q: Yes, unfortunately.

A: But what did you want to ask about?

Q: Just that your name is Szymaniak.

A: Now. During the Occupation he changed his name to Stanislaw Szymaniak and he kept the change. He officially changed his name. When I married him his name was Szymaniak. I knew him from childhood as Felek Miller, then he became Stanislaw Szymaniak.

Q: What was the reason for not going back to his old name?

A: Because of anti-Semitism. Because of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism was worse after the war than before. People never minded making comments in front of me. A woman could be twenty-eight years old, she would not even know what a Jew looked like. She would say to her child “_____, you’re behaving like a nasty Jew.” The racism was greater. Admittedly, many Jews worked in the UB. I did not tell the UB about that first camp either. I did not tell anyone about that camp, just the second one. I never admitted it to anyone. To this day, in Poland, only my closest friends know about that camp. The ones that I know from before the war. I do not advertise the fact that I am Jewish. Because now the same thing is happening.

Q: That’s sad.

A: Very sad, very sad.

Q: That was what I wanted to know. I think that is all.

A: I finish my much-abbreviated retelling of those very sad recollections of that horrible time of my life during which I lost all of my near and distant family and my friends and the friends of my youth and dedicate it to my grandsons Feliks and Benedykt and to all of the children of the world and all of the parents of the world, and all of the people of the world, with the hope that that awful inhuman time will never have a sequel.