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Where were you born?

"Krakow"(PH), Poland in 1925

What was your house like before the war?

It was mother, father, brother and myself in the house.

What was your social status?

My father and my grandfather on my mother's side had a small business together. We were middle class.

How religious were you?

Very Orthodox.

What was your cultural life before the war?

I was a child. My mother was very Orthodox, as was my house, but in a very modern sense. My parents were not especially educated. Mother came from a small town, and had taken Polish and French lessons without her parents knowledge. My father, too, was a little educated, not of a higher degree.

What was your family's relationship with non-Jews?

I don't remember close friends in Krakow, but my father's family was also from a small town, a village. He was my grandfather who was rich, and he was feared, and there he had a connection with the Polish people. Many worked for my grandfather, but they also had others that they knew very well. It was a small town. The Jews had more connections.

What was the means of support for your family?

The business.

Were you rural or urban in setting?

More of an urban setting

Did you encounter anti-Semitic experiences before the war?

Face to face with someone that screamed "Jew!?" I never did, but the undercurrent was there. I went to a Polish public school, but it was only for Jewish girls. I suppose this was done to accommodate(?) us because on Saturday the school was closed, because Catholic ones were open. This was more of a Jewish neighborhood.

Do you remember your parents talking about anything concerning the Jewish population? Were they worried?

I didn't hear any. I assume they were. Hitler was around. It was Hitler next door. But, we were a big family, such a close family. If everyone would have known exactly that such a thing would happen, then things would be different. Nobody believed it.

What options were open to you and your family as the war became more imminent? Choices as you heard about what was happening in Germany and in Poland?

I was young, but I remember some about it. I read later about it. About "Sunderland"(PH) and everything that was going on. The options for our family left? Not many. First of all, we didn't want to part with the family and also we didn't have money to leave. Maybe if my grandfather would have sold his mill and all of his fields, all the family could leave. But, the family did not want to destroy everything. It didn't seem like you had to destroy and run.

How old were you when the war broke out?

Fourteen.

How did the first word of the war reach you?

It was summer, and I was at my grandfather's farm working. That was where we usually went (the grandchildren). This was the best treat in the world. I know that the radio was all the time blaring, talking about the threats from Germany. And all the Polish people were saying they were not afraid of them because we had England and France with us. But, also, I was in the country not a big town. My father, though, sent somebody for me two days before the war broke out because I was there by myself, without my parents. So I came back to Kraków and everybody was preparing. Like putting paper on the windows, so in the case of a bomb they wouldn't shatter. And in case gases were used, there were masks. And then two days later, the war broke out. This was a terrible feeling.

How did your family respond once the war broke out?

We did what everybody else did, basically. I remember that my maternal grandfather was a big optimist. Somebody went out in the morning to buy bread two days later, and she saw some strange soldiers on the bridge. There was a river in the middle of our town. So my grandfather says, "Oh, those are the French and English." Because we thought it was the Germans already. So, it was about two or three days later that they came to Kraków. But what happened in the beginning was everyone panicked. It frightened the whole town. The families were going together to one house. My mother, brother and me went to her parents' house, and all the men left town. All the Jewish men. Because everyone was saying that when the Germans come in, they kill the men, but do not touch the women or the children. So, it was unbelievable. In the, streets, it was masses waking in the direction of the East (Russia). Towards "Lutch" (ph).

My father left. Maybe because he was my father, he seemed to me to be the best man in the world, the best husband in the world. He was considered by the whole family. And that such a man left, and left his wife and children, it was some kind of a big "bang" (PH). He passed his parents place where their mill was. On his way to Russia. As he passed, he said goodbye to his mother, who was very smart. And she said, "Where are you going?" He said, "I am running from the Germans." And so she said, "And you left your wife and children? You're not going no where. You are going back." So she single-handedly decided and a very good son. Always close with mother.

Anyway, so he stayed for a few days. When the Germans cam, then he came back into town. Many came. Many were on the road. In those days in Poland, they were full with people running. Mostly Jews. I don't know who. Men. They were running to Russia away from Germany. Many made it. Many men stayed by themselves in Russia. In those years 1940, 1941 many were coming back, but many left. I have friends whose fathers survived in Russia while their mothers died in Poland.

Obviously that was one of the first major changes you saw in your family - with your father leaving?

Yes.

Can you remember other changes? Your family's job, school, your social life? From the beginning of the war?

In religious life, nothing changed. What we kept at home no one would change.

And social life?

School ended and so I stayed at home. A few months later we got private teachers because there was this thought that maybe soon the war would be over. We had English lessons because there was the

feeling that "this was it".
At home?

Yes.

With your brother?

No. He was thirteen years younger. When the war broke out he was one year old. I was helping at home a lot. We always had help at home. In Poland you didn't have to be rich. But during the war there wasn't any. So I helped.

Was your school a private Jewish school?

No, public. But, I went for two years to a Hebrew school.

Were you able to keep your possessions and stay in the same home once the war got started?

First of all, we closed our house and went to the grandmother's to be together, and my father went away. But, in a few days things settled.

They were terrorizing people in the street, but nothing of mass murders. They must have had a good psychologist, I suppose, to tell how to terrorize people.

Expecting the war to start in Poland, there were ditches around town and in town in case of bombarding. In my town, Kraków, not one building was damaged. You could just hear the planes coming. It was a terrible feeling. They were coming, but they weren't bombing.

When they came in, I remember them saying that the ditches had to be filled within three days or they would be filled with Jews. So, who would not go? We were standing there day and night covering those ditches. Not one Polish person was helping. Maybe in other places they were. We were on our own or else in those ditches.

Were you in a Ghetto at any point?

Yes. But, coming back to the other, we were in our houses until 1940. We even kept our business open and continued living from it. But, then they started to make the Ghetto "Ganiv"(PH). And then we left.

Can you describe the Ghetto?

I was not there until 1942. Two years later. Because when we left Kraków not everyone could get into the Ghetto. Who wants to leave can leave. And my father said he would rather be out in the country with his parents than in the Ghetto. So we left. We took what we could. Our furniture we tried to sell.

We went to my grandfather's mill in the country, where we stayed nearly one and a half years in relative quiet. Whereas, people in the Ghetto in Kraków suffered quite a lot. Segregation and "?".

Did you still interact with others?

Yes. Once we came there we stayed there. I don't think we could travel. When we came there, my grandfather gave his mill to a Polish man, who had earned his confidence. We were advised the Germans would take it away. The arrangement was so that we could have food during the war. We don't need anything more. This worked for one month, but in the second month, the Pole said he could give only something for the grandparents, but nothing for the children. Somehow we made do. Everybody did something. They knew how to knit and sew, and we had contact with the peasants. We had food enough. If they had left us until the end we would have been happiest, but they didn't.

At what point did you have to leave the mill and go to the Ghetto?

When we went to the mill in 1940, we were forty people in my immediate family. My father had five brothers and a sister, and everyone had children. We all went there and stayed even when the Pole said he could not support us. At first, he agreed saying to my grandfather that everything was his and that he was just there to cooperate. My grandfather just wanted him to make with the mill whatever he could. During war, a mill makes a lot of money. So, my grandfather said do what you can. We just need food for the whole family.

What town was the mill in?

A small town near Kraków called 'Porforvitzall(PH).

And then you went to the Ghetto?

No. The Germans were already forming The Final Solution, so they didn't want Jews all over in these small towns in Poland. So there came an order saying that no Jew can live in the country or small villages. They all have to move to a small Ghetto or town nearby "Porforvitzall"(PH). It was quite tight there because before the war there were about 2000 Jews there, but during the war it swelled to about double or more. Some would rather be dead than in the Ghetto. When we came, they made room without hesitancy. People who had two room and five children gave away a room. We were all happy to be anywhere. Just to stay. There we stayed half a year. Then what made us go to the Ghetto is that the "Judenrein"(PH), this means "clean of Jews". They would take away the whole town. This was going already to the ovens. They were rounding up the little towns and transporting them to Treblinka, Bergen-Belsen.

Can you describe a typical day there once you moved?

This Ghetto is very much a haze for me because it was after we ran away from the little town. We found ourselves completely alone. So much had happened to us really before we got to the Ghetto. None of my father's siblings survived the war, except the youngest brother who had moved to Israel. Not even my father. He died the last month before liberation. He had so much energy and so much feeling of surviving that he pushed so hard. I suppose many did. He had more than his brothers and he nearly succeeded. Besides me and my mother survived and he nearly survived.

The Ghetto?

No the whole war. And when we moved from the mill into the small town about six months later they rounded up the town and took them to Treblinka, I suppose. So we did not accept the invitation.

You had a choice?

Yes. We went to the country, the Polish people, just for a few days. Then the ghetto. Then the camp. And we survived the camp. But, when you went on the train -- nobody had a chance.

What camp did you go to? How did you reach it?

I have to say that me and my mother must have had a special angel somewhere waiting in the wings all the time. In the Ghetto, people were working all the time. When we arrived, there was one aunt. In Kraków, I had a big family, but no one stayed in the Ghetto there. In one room, the size maybe of the kitchen in this house. We were sleeping like this every night. How did we get to camp? Also, what was the Ghetto like? This I don't remember well. We didn't have a job. We were illegal in the Ghetto. Everybody had a paper, but we didn't. We were from a small town and we had smuggled ourselves into the Ghetto.

As a young girl, we were completely uninterested in things. You couldn't sit down and read a book, because your mind was completely dead. After a few months, we knew something was going on. Somebody said the whole Ghetto was surrounded by Germans. My father feared for us because on top of being Jews, we were illegal. Any selection process could mean that we would be the first to go to Auschwitz or whatever. My father wanted to go down and see what was going on. There were trucks and people willingly going with suitcases. Then, I see my best friend, whom I hadn't seen since first leaving Kraków. She is with suitcase, and so I say, "Where are you going?" She said that she is working at the airport, and that they are making a small camp there, and so she is going to live there. She asked what we were doing and when I said didn't know, she said we should get on the bus with her, because this place is good, it is better than living in the Ghetto. We worried about being punished, but she said we would not. So, we got on the track with her.

This was the German Air Force. Not the Gestapo or the SS. We got permission to stay there and we stayed one year. That was the end of 1942 to the end of 1943. This was the worst time for the Jews. The whole Kraków Ghetto was liquidated. It was a bloodbath there. They took people to Auschwitz. She really saved our lives.

Were other members of your family selected to go to concentration camps ?

Yes. Some, but not many, because most of my family went straight to Treblinka. Two went to camps, awful camps, but they survived.

What do you remember of the camp?

I was lucky. I wasn't in Auschwitz, and I was with my mother all the time. When we arrived at the first camp at the airport, they needed us to work there. We cleaned the houses, work in the kitchens, even clean the street. They gave us some food.

My mother had a diamond ring in the Ghetto. You keep such a thing for the worst moment. Working there, they did not take the money away from us. There were Polish people working there, too. We bought food, and were not hungry. After a year, they took us to "Bwaso" (PH). There they separated us from my father. He went to Auschwitz. In 1944, I was in three camps. Four months in "Bwaso" (PH), four months in 'Kasheskoll (PH), and four months in "Transalova" (PH).

How did you go from one to the other?

In wagons. Every time, my mother would say, "We are going to Auschwitz . I don't believe what they are telling us." But, with us it was the truth.

Did you have any possessions with you?

Actually, we came back in the same coats in which we left. We didn't go to Auschwitz, that's the whole thing. And when we were in "Kashesko" (Ph), we were also lucky. We came after the typhoid epidemic. There was a little more food. Then in "Translova", the last four months, we were lucky that they left us when the Russians came in. In January 1945, the Russians took Poland, so we were liberated in 1945.

How were the camps you were in? Size? Guarded? The officers? Who else was in the camp with you?

The first camp at the airport, 150 people. Half men and half women. Only two barracks. There was a wire guard and a "?". The guard even had orders not to ask us where we were going, because we were going or coming to work. Everybody had separate hours.

Were you allowed to mix male and female?

Yes.

Your food?

We could buy. We had some contact with the Polish people. The Gestapo came once. They said, "This is a camp?" At least the Germans there were human.

You said there was an angel with you the whole time?

Yes.

And your mother was with you the whole time?

Yes.

How did you get the news about Auschwitz?

We knew about it from the beginning.

The Gestapo came and took you out of there?

Yes, but not on the same day. We knew our days were numbered.

What happened?

"Bwaso" was also near Kraków. It was a camp run by the Gestapo also. It was quite hot there, but it wasn't Auschwitz and it didn't have ovens. They had a place where they were shooting Jews, those found with false papers. We could always hear it. If you do this and this, you'll find yourselves on the hill over there. In four months we went to "Kasheshko"(Ph) which was much easier.

Did you work there?

Yes. It was a munitions factory. Precise work. I had the feeling that the Germans there were watching out for their own skin, not to be sent to the Russian front.

And you had enough food in that camp?

Yes, because of the contact with the Polish people, who also worked for the factory. They would bring us food. The business was going all the time.

In any of the camps was there any kind of cultural activity?

In the last one, we had a theater. We had one of the main actors of Jewish theater there.

Any political activity?

No. We had enough activity.

Religious activity?

We knew when it was Yom Kippur let's say. In the first camp at the airport, they would give out more potatoes on Passover than bread. But at the other camps on Yom Kippur, they would give you more just to make you suffer. In the camp there was the uncertainty of whether they would take you away and kill you, but we were not dying of hunger.

Was there a lot of illness?

At the one camp, I saw people walking like skeletons. It was typhus. More than half died, but if they survived they recuperated. Looked better.

Were there any types of special communication in the camps? For you it was different since you had the contact with the Polish people.

No we didn't have the "food"(PH) to communicate. But even if we did, we didn't do it because we didn't want to get the other people in trouble, that he's Jewish or whatever.

What really attributed to the survival of you and your mother?

Lots of luck, but also we didn't go to the train. We had to struggle. The train, that was it. My father's one brother survived, four did not. We were eighteen grandchildren. Three were in Israel, so there were fifteen. Four survived. When my father died in 1945, he was 45. I thought he was an old man. His brothers were older than him. Of the seven grandchildren who lived, we are now 42 people. Only from one brother did no one survive.

Where was your brother in all of this?

We were all together in the country until the order came saying we could not live there. So we moved to the small town. We started to hear that they were taking whole towns. And some people believed that the places they were going to were work places. Some believed then that they would still survive the war, and so they made plans. When we moved to the town, we moved into a small house with a Poles who rented us a room. Next door, were people who were not from this town. Because in this little town, near my grandfather's mill, the town was 75% my family. Every second person was a "Kleiner"(PH), or married to one. When they took away this town, we lost hundreds. But, I don't count this, just the immediate. So we were not strangers in this town. Everyone knew everyone.

There were some strangers. A couple with two children my age, which was sixteen now. They weren't Polish citizens. I think they were German or Rumanian Jews. They said they would keep our child. How did the Jews surround the town? I remember it was a Saturday and all the Jews had to be in the center of town, the market, with a 20 lb. package. But this did not apply to them because they

weren't Poles.

I remember that when we left the child we said that if we were not to survive, he should go to the uncle and cousin in Israel. I remember his scream when we left.

How old was he then?

He was born in 1938, at the time it was 1942. He was four. I remember the screams, but my father was so set to do something, so sure that everything was lost no matter what. He told us to continue walking, not to turn back, because this was best for him. We had to run away from this town because the Germans were to surround it the next day and take everyone. We went to a Polish peasant, who we knew, who used to years ago work for my grandfather. He drove the horse and buggy. Nice man. Without getting in touch with him, we had to get there. We knew where he lived. Even for a few days.

We had to separate because three was more conspicuous when trying to run away. So my father took the train to Kraków, because he looked more Polish than me and my mother. He had a premonition. He sent a Polish man that he knew in Kraków to the small town and told him to take the little boy and bring him to Kraków. When he came the child was not there. We found out later that they had taken six other children, so they had seven. After the storm had quieted down those two days, they went to the police and said that all of the parents had run away and left their children. I don't know why they did it. They didn't take money from us. Maybe they couldn't say no and then they got scared. They were not correct people. Remember there was an angel watching over us, me and my mother. How did my mother and I get out? My father went to Kraków. We went to the Polish man. We slept in hay. The next morning, his wife said she was afraid, and we could not stay. When he came back from work that afternoon, we wanted him to tell us. It was 1942, September. He said the same so we went. We began walking, and we saw others walking. When they saw us they would immediately fall to the ground, and so we knew they were Jews also on the run. We were not eager to join up with them because it is worse in groups. We laid down on the ground, and I remember really feeling like there was nothing between the earth and the sky, and there was nothing else to your name. But my mother said we had to take another chance and go to another village and maybe somebody will help us.

We came into another small village and approached a group of peasants. We knew that there was another small town nearby with Jews in it who were not gone yet, so we asked if one of them would take us to that town.

How did you know all of this?

Somehow. Peasants were talking. We had silver "takelee"(PH), we knew it was good for something. We didn't have money. We were happy only when we could eat in the war. My mother had her diamond in her button. This was something that could help us. The men would not

take us, but they knew a widow at the end of town who would. She said yes, but we didn't pay her because we didn't have money. We told her that we were from the mill and that when we survive, she will have free flour. She put us in a silo with hay and corn to sleep. This I remember. A nightmare. We lay down to go to sleep and all of a sudden, we hear the door opening. Steps are coming. My mother is talking louder so they will know someone is there. Saying, "We are poor women, we have nothing." It was a cat. When we found out, we both fell asleep like dead. Let me tell you what this means. I am a person who's afraid of a fly. Underneath us are rats and mice moving, but I did not think to not fall asleep. In the morning, before light, the woman came in and took us to the town. My mother knew the address of someone there. There again we were lucky. There was a law there that said you could not sell to anybody that had run away from another town. So every night, for about four nights, we went to a different Jewish house to sleep. So it wouldn't be like somebody was keeping us. There was already talk that this town was going in a few days to Treblinka or wherever.

At these houses, my mother would tell me to take off my shoes and go to sleep. Meanwhile, she would sit up and listen to the others' plans. She came to me one night and told me we were going to Kraków, the original town. We had run like mice from one place to another. The Germans used to take young men to factories. It was cheap work for them. Some of them were from neighboring towns and had heard what was going on in the other towns. They asked the Germans if they could bring their brothers and sisters to work in the factories. They were making bricks there. The Germans agreed. One day they arrived to the town of their brothers and sisters, but it was already closed by the Germans. They were merely cleaning up. So they left, but they didn't want to leave empty-handed because they thought maybe they could still save someone. They stopped on the edge of this highway, very close to the house where we slept. They came around and said they were going to Kraków and anyone who wanted to come had to leave in five minutes. So, we jumped on this truck. We went to the Kraków Ghetto. We met up with my father who was already there. We then found out that we had lost the brother. My father had already known, and was very upset. And then from the Ghetto my friend took us in the truck to the savior, the camp. In comparison to Auschwitz, going to this camp was like going to America.

Did you know that you father was okay?

This time? No. We ran into him by chance. He knew the address of our aunt in Kraków Ghetto. This I remember. My father saying, "Do you see what they did to us? I did not cry for my parents or my brother or anybody. I can only cry for my son ill.

Had your father been in the Ghetto all this time?

It was only about a week that all this happened. Then in the Ghetto it was becoming like fall. We had nothing to put on. I don't know how, but the Germans said that everybody in the little towns could come back and nobody would do anything to them. We went back to get some clothes. We saw those people from next door, and my mother got hysterical. The man said to her, "You'd better be quiet or you won't be around here too long, either." We heard that he was later murdered by the partisans. After the war, my mother met his two children in Budapest, in the Jewish community there. But you cannot hang a son for the sins of his father.

Did you have other experiences of hiding in the war?

No, because when we came back to the small town and my brother was not there any more, this was all before the camps and we were in the Ghetto with my father. When they said we could go back, we decided to, and sell our remaining belongings to get some money. Then we would go either back to the Kraków Ghetto, or try and find somebody amongst the Polish people willing to hide us. We stayed in the town "Porforvitza"(PH), after that man threatened my mother, and tried to sell our things to the peasants. One told us to be on the alert, and that when we saw danger to come and he would hide us. There were no numbers on the houses in such a small village, so they told us more or less which house to come to.

One day, my father came to us and said the Polish police and the Germans were coming and taking everyone away. So we went away in the evening. We had prepared knapsacks with underwear and a sweater, and we went to a little forest nearby. We stayed until it was completely dark outside, then we went to find the house. The dogs were howling in the night. We found her, and she was leaving us food. I don't think she had a husband or a son. We could always hear some shooting.

One day there was some noise in the neighborhood, more than usual. My father did not like it. He wanted us to put on everything we had, including underwear. We had just finished this, when the door opened and we were told to leave because they were going door to door, and shooting. They shot some we knew, relatives who were not close. We ran down from the attic and towards Kraków. We had this feeling, like I have to make, but there is no need to because I don't have to go anymore. Because as we came down we heard shots quite near. We continued walking, and all of a sudden we hear, "Dora(PH)!". That was my mother's name. My mother had three sisters. Two were murdered. The one who called my mother's name was one of their husbands. On my mother's side, we were only three grandchildren, because she was the oldest one. But, on my father's side we were many because he was one of the youngest. Her husband saw us through the window and called out, "Where are you going?" We answered to Kraków, and he wanted to join us. We then made two groups. I walked with him about five minutes behind my mother and father, so that if we got caught we would not be all four of us.

Somebody all of a sudden started to call "Jude" behind us, and we didn't have our band arm on, they were in the pocket. Jews were not allowed to walk around like this outside of the Ghetto. We got caught in Kraków. We were lucky that he did not call the Gestapo, he called the nearby Germans, which happened to be the airport, where I later worked. This man sent two soldiers for us. I started crying because I thought he was going to shoot us. He said he was not, and he gave us papers to go to the Ghetto. It was lucky. When we arrived in the Ghetto, my parents were already there. From there we went to the camps.

In the camps, it was just a matter of one suffered more. Some came back from camp. It was those who went on the train to Treblinka that nobody came back. I know from my family that whoever went to the camps, 50% came back.

Did you go with your mother to the camps?

And my father, but later we were in separate camps. Somebody who came back said that he still saw my father alive in March 1945 in the camps.

Where did they separate you?

Yes, at the airport about six months later. They came and took men. He was older at the time. He was 43. Everybody else was 18 or 20.

That was the last time you saw your father?

Yes, because when they brought us to the second camp, "Bwaso" (PH), he was already in Auschwitz.

Was there any time that you had any false papers?

No. I had a nose job in the United States. With my former nose, I could not have papers.

Did you know about any resistance groups at the time?

No. In the Ghetto, a cousin of ours said he was making a group to the partisans. The end was that he was arrested, disappeared. When we first were going away from the little town, when all were going to Treblinka, the day we left the child to survive. Two close cousins, older, told me to come with them and we would work together, knit and sew. We would survive this way. An alternative to running away with my father. My father said I cannot tell you what to do, where to go. I was afraid of being shot. He said the one thing he could tell me was that there I was 100% dead, but here, with him, I was 99% dead. He did not fool himself. He had such remorse that we didn't go away in the beginning. There was the chance. Somehow everyone was comfortable in their own homes. Didn't quite believe it until it was too late.

You always think, like with smoking cigarettes, it will happen to somebody else not to me. I don't think the Germans knew in the beginning. The Final Solution was not until later.

Were you in the camps until the war ended?

No, until the Russians liberated in 1945.

How were you liberated?

We were lucky they didn't have time to take us to Germany. In the morning we heard we would not go to work in the third camp's ammunition factory. We hear the front is nearing. We hear we are going to Germany. They were still going by order, calling out names. They called out 500 names, men only. They took wagons and they went the same day. They went to "settlement"(?). Then the next transport was to go out. But, they were still calling out names. I found out that I was not on the list going. I figured my mother would be the first one they would get rid of, since she was older. Forty-five.

So, I changed with somebody, my own name, to go with my mother. Nobody was with their own name anymore. I changed numbers with one girl. So, when they called her name, I came up. It happened that this girl was quite loose, she was sleeping around with everyone. When I came up to sign my name, the Jewish policeman had a very astonished look on his face.

Anyway, I am out, but my mother is not.

They called you by name and not by number?

By name. So, I didn't really need to change because she was not on the list. So, she changed with somebody and came out, too. They took us to a big hall on the grounds of the factory. We sat for a few hours, then the door opened. The Germans were already in civilian clothes, with big guns strapped to their sides. They told us we were going back into the camp. It was a big circle. Here was the factory, and here was the camp, together. We didn't even have the barbed wire, because behind the barracks was a river. We said to ourselves, "This is it. The Russians are coming." Then they were sorry they let us out, the Germans. They were afraid to come into the camp anymore. Some boys came in and took over, because they were going from one barrack to the other telling us that the next time we are told to leave, not to move. Over the loudspeaker, the Germans were telling us the camp is mined and we'd better come out. But the boys told us the camp was not mined. They left. In the evening there was pandemonium. The Russians were pounding and the Germans had run away. We were in the town. Near was a paper factory that caught fire. Nobody killed.

We were running like crazy. Not we so much. My mother was so alive. I didn't have to fend for myself like everyone else. I stayed mama's little daughter. I was sitting there doing nothing, and my mother disappeared all night. I am thinking, "My God! Where is she?" But, then I knew, she was getting things somewhere. When the daylight came, she and four other women arrived, carrying a huge bar of soap on their shoulders. The Germans must have had it. They cut it up on the floor, and later we had it to trade for food. When people were liberated in Germany, they could just go into houses and take. But, in Poland, we could not do this, it was not our right like in Germany. So she bought some clothes and shoes.

We knew that in the morning the Russians were coming. I remember a doctor, standing on a table in the middle of the camp giving a speech, praising Stalin. I said to my mother, the Germans will probably come back instead, but they didn't. The Russians came in, but they didn't understand what we were doing in there. They told us to get out of there, so we asked where we should go, and he replied, "Go home."

I remember seeing the first Russian. This is when I cried. But, they didn't smile, the soldiers passing by. Maybe they were shocked by what they saw, but we didn't look so terrible that they should be shocked. We left the camp and went to stay in a school.

Were you or your mother ill at this time?

No. We were healthy because we were not in Auschwitz, and we were getting a pound of bread a day, and a soup. I never got so much as a slap from anybody.

Did your number change at the camp?

It changed from camp to camp. One, they had this craziness with the paint. They painted us yellow from our chest down and on the back, also with a number on the back.

On clothing?

Yes.

Were you allowed to shower?

Yes. Men and women separate. In the winter, I went out with wet hair, it sometimes froze, but I never had a cold.

When the Russians came in were they cruel in any way?

No. But, one thing, my mother was thinking that, she being an older woman was not good. The Russian soldiers were known for raping women, so we kept together in a group with men. The husband of a friend of my mother's and another young boy. So we were together in this school. We all slept together, since we were afraid to sleep

alone. Who ran the school?
It was closed. We just slept in the building.

Nobody was there helping?

No, we were liberated already.

How did you get food at this point?

We didn't. Not like at camp where we got food every day, rations. But in the school, there were some Russians, and they baked some bread. We couldn't just get it. While we were cooking, the boys went to work helping to bake and carry the bread. We stayed just a few days and then everyone went home.

Your home was still there?

No. Home meant the town from where we came. We went to an apartment, not ours. There was already a Jewish community in Kraków, and they had a house with a kitchen. For the first year after the war, it served as a meeting place for those coming back. We went to see who else was there. We stayed only about two nights. It was too much a reminder of camp life. In the morning there was a bell to wake everyone. They liked it and were used to it. Habits. We only stayed the night or two, because we had a house. My grandfather's mill, so we didn't have to be beggars. We went there, but in those two days we met cousins, a boy and a girl. We told them to come with us, and get food that was ours. We walked all day, about 30 km. It wasn't that we had no money for the train, but the Russian front had just passed through, and the Germans had left. Poland was like dead.

When we arrived, the guy living at the mill said he would not move out until my grandfather came. He knew that he was not alive anymore. But, he agreed to give us food. We were happy just for that, too. Through the courts, inheritance, we were able to get it back. The day we came back, I met my husband.

You had never met him before?

No. He was a young boy, only 21 years old. I was 20. He was hiding out with the Polish people in this small town with others. He was from this town where my grandfather's mill was, but I never knew him. He knew my family, but was from Kraków. I only came there in the summers.

Did he stay with you at the mill then?

No. He didn't know who we were. When we were walking from Kraków, someone gave us a ride into town on a horse and buggy carriage. When we got to town, he was standing on the street with a friend. Somehow he noticed us. We didn't look like peasants. He motioned to us to come down. We looked at them because they also looked strange.

My husband's pants were too short because he'd grown, as was his jacket. His ears were frozen so he had a cream on them. He asked us if we were Jewish. We said yes. Then he asked who we were. When we told him we were the Kleiner's from the mill, he insisted on going there at once because the whole town knew how badly we'd been treated by the Pole. We met in January and married in October.

Did you search for other family members?

Later, we travelled to Kraków to an apartment and we always went to the Jewish Community House there. We didn't travel looking because we knew whoever survived knows where to come.

How did you find out about your father?

Right away. The cousins who we met up with in Kraków. She survived as a Christian and he was in Auschwitz. When the Russians came to evacuate Auschwitz he wouldn't go. He said we saw my father a week ago. Nobody heard after.

What was the sequence of events from the start of the war?

When the war broke out I was in Kraków till 1940. Summer of '40, we moved to the mill in the country, to a small village near "Porforvitza"(PH). We stayed there nearly a year. In beginning of '42, we had to leave because Jews could not live in the country. So we moved to "Poforvitza". They were cleaning out the Jews one town after another in August and September of '42. So we went to the country to try and hide. And from there we went to the Ghetto in Kraków. After a few months we went back to "Poforvitza" to get some of our things. From there we had to run away again. It was the end of '42. We hid then for a week with Polish peasants. Then to the Kraków Ghetto. About a month there. In the beginning of '43, we went to the camp at the airport, where we stayed for one year. Then in beginning of '44, to another camp. In '44, we were in three camps. "Bwaso"(PH) for a month, then the spring, until the fall, we were in "Kasheshko"(PH). Then the Russians were coming nearer, so we were taken to "Translova"(PH). There, after 4 months, in January '45, we were liberated by the Russians. What are your feelings about your experiences at the time?

Loss for the people I left. The older I get, the more I feel it. When we were losing members of our family, we were not mourning because we weren't sure whether they were luckier than us because they were not suffering any more, and we were still. We might join them anyway. Two years later, we were liberated. Lost most of our family in the middle of '42. This was the big sweep. In '45, when we were liberated it wasn't time to cry. We were toughened. We would cry when friends got together, had a drink, you could see the tragedy then. Not laughing after the drink, but crying. That was our entertainment. We were also so full of life. We wanted to live.

Maybe I had less hurt psychologically because I was so young. Same with my friends. The older may have had more trouble. Maybe 20 was the right age. I cannot imagine a mother going through, thinking something could happen to my child. I cannot compare a mother to a young girl. The family that we lost. We were so close. My mother's sisters were younger. So much fun. I was the oldest grandchild. The social life? My grandparents were very Orthodox. The girls were not. They had professions. One was a hat maker and the other made lingerie. They didn't even start to live yet, they didn't even have families yet.

How did the war influence your values?

Some worry about getting cancer. Me, I would say, what do I have to worry about? My life, I had 14 years like a gift because I was basically considered dead.

But, a year ago, I thought I had cancer, and I was in a panic. Life doesn't go like that. I don't consider it the ultimate that something valuable gets broken.

You know what's precious in life?

Yes. And I know that I could never drive a fancy car. I know its a fear inside.

Why?

Not to flash, show. It's in a fearing way. With my husband, I know his suffering, feeling that he has no roots. He never feels at home.

What kept you going during the war? At scary moments?

I was never so physically tired. Life, the will to live.

How religious were you in comparison, before and after the war?

Nothing. After we didn't keep Kosher. Not even my mother. But, later she married, but only somebody who did, because she said otherwise he wouldn't fit with her. The first time to eat something not Kosher wasn't so easy. But after once or twice, you see its ok.

Before the war, I never ate not Kosher, and never did anything on Saturday. But, I was from those who were not fanatics, unlike my mother's family.

What feelings did you have about being Jewish?

Never a doubt. Never something else. Consciously I thought to myself. I worked with Poles, people from the other side. I could see, like through a window, I didn't like it.

The Germans could never make me feel bad. I was cleaning the toilet, but I didn't feel lower because I felt I could be here or on the other side, which I didn't like.

Did you talk about your experiences after -- you and your mother openly? With whom?

In the beginning we used to tell stories with each other. So many different. My husband had hilarious stories.

Any relations with non-Jews in Poland after?

Not especially. We kept good Jews.

When did you leave Poland?

1946. I was expecting. We went 2 years in Germany because we wanted to leave Poland. We left illegally, we had no passports. In Germany there was American occupation. In '48 we went to Bolivia. In '53 we went to Canada. What was your motivation in having your first child?

An experience. It was the Baby Boom -- everybody had a child. Everybody felt that they needed a family. I had a mother, a large family, some cousins. But, my husband was completely alone. He had one uncle, one cousin. He needed a family.

What values did you try to transpire from the war?

What we feel, what we are. I don't know if it had to do with the war.

What kind of reception did Jews get? Were people open to your story?

In the beginning we were the only true survivors. The Polish I don't remember telling them anything.

Did many survivors go to Bolivia?

No. A cousin was there. But, we got impatient in Germany.

Why did your cousin go?

Other family connections.

Did you join any survivor organizations?

In the beginning the Society in Kraków, but not after.

At home you spoke Polish?

Polish. English later. The children were not spoken to directly in

Polish, but they heard us speak it, as did our friends.
What did you communicate to your children about the Holocaust?

I don't remember consciously. Some talk too much, some too little. I was normal, not too much, not too little. My husband talks more about it, but he was not in camp. I think in some ways this was worse, his not being in a camp because every move you think someone is coming for you. He is more intense than me.

What feelings do you have about Canada?

I like it. I think in Canada there's a feeling of "patriotism" (?)

Maybe because their country was never in danger.

Do you think another Holocaust is possible?

I don't know if another Holocaust, but something like it. Nothing could be, it was the worst. I am not completely quiet in my feelings. The Jewish question remains inside me. Nothing can make you laugh as we can laugh inside. My family, we worry and we laugh.

Now I say, I would have to be somewhere in the middle of America, not New York, but somewhere where they don't care what's happening in the Middle East.

How do you feel the Holocaust affected the course of your life?

Well, we went from place to place. We were young. It was hard, but we were young. Every part was hard, but some good came out of it. Also, we were such responsible people. When we left Europe for South America, I was 22, my husband 24, and we had a 1 1/2 year old child. My mother didn't go with us. She wanted to go to Israel, so she went. And I thought to myself, "How would I manage without my mother? I was so used to being with her?" We were there 5 years. Nobody could say we did anything wrong there.

Before you asked how did other people react? How did they understand it? We ourselves wanted to be normal. We didn't want others' help or from psychologists. Now they say, the hostages in Iran need psychologists, but how come nobody asked us? Everybody expected us to be normal right away. We expected to be normal right away. this is why maybe we weren't. I have found that the people who had trouble were maybe the ones who weren't so young when they were liberated. My mother was basically okay, even though she lost a son and a husband. But, she kept this in her mind. She said she couldn't say anything to anyone because she survived with a daughter, and many survived with nothing. She appreciated this.

Is there anything you would like to cover that we have not?

No, I think I said my piece. Just the thought that we are not here forever. That's the only consolation in the whole thing, I think.

How did you feel about answering all these questions?

All right. I suppose I thought things out in my mind. That's how it is, in life I enjoy what I have. My whole family, if they would see everything I have, the children, I'm sure they would enjoy it, too. It's too bad that they could not have it.

.END.→