Interview with NELLY CESANA
Holocaust Oral History Project
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Q: COULD YOU INTRODUCE YOURSELF WITH YOUR MAIDEN NAME AND WHERE AND WHEN YOU WERE BORN.

A: My name is Nelly (Ziegler). I was born September 29, 1935, in Warsaw. I also know the address where my parents use to live. It is (Pavia) Street, No. 54, 4th Floor, Apartment No. 73. I had an older brother who was nine years older than me whose name was (Marian), and we called him (Maratek). My father's name was (Josef) and my mother's (Paula).

The earliest memory that I have is as a young child going for a walk with my father when he use to take me for a walk and walking with him in the streets in Warsaw. My father looked like a giant to me, next to me. He was a big man, tall man. He held my hand and [laughs] his hand was large, and I felt very good and very happy. We would stop by in a little grocery store, and my father would buy me a heart-shaped honey cookie. I'll

never remember the taste of that cookie. It was sweet like honey and it was delicious.

The next thing that I can remember is my childhood. We lived in that apartment which was I believe one room, my parents and my brother and myself, and there was a kitchen and there was a balcony.

When I was sick, I stayed in my parent's bed. I remember to entertain me my mother would give me a very large pocketbook, a red, shiny pocketbook which was filled with pictures, family pictures. This was one of my favorite activities, to look through the pictures. That's how I spent time when I had to stay in bed.

I would also get into my brother's collection of cowboy books, sort of like comic books. I loved to look at pictures and I guess I would tear some out. When he came home, he was very upset with me [laughs], yes, but he was a sweet brother to me. I also remember when he use to play with

me. My favorite game was when I stood on his feet and I would put my arms around his waistline, and I would walk in his steps. Those are the memories I have.

The next thing I remember is the first sounds of the war. This must have been in 1939 when the Germans were bombing Warsaw. We, my mother, my father, and I, were all in bed, and something came through the ceiling. Shrapnel fell into the room and there was panic. We looked out and people were running in the street, and they said that some factories were bombed. My father went out and he brought back some jars of sauerkraut and pickles. He said that the factory was bombed and everybody was grabbing whatever they could.

Q: WERE YOU ALREADY HAVING DIFFICULTY GETTING FOOD DURING THAT PERIOD?

A: I'm sure. I can't remember, but I'm sure. It was difficult. Times were hard.

The next thing I remember is when we were in the ghetto. This must be in 1941 now because that's when they built the wall around the ghetto and gathered all the Jews.

No, excuse me, there is something else I remember before that. When we were still living altogether in our apartment, we heard commotion and shooting and screaming in the street and we all ran to the balcony to look down. There were German officers and there was a Jew in the street right below our balcony, a religious Jew, he had a long beard. They stood and they were cutting his beard off. I remember my mother started crying because she said that they were ripping his beard out, not really cutting, but they were ripping his flesh out.

Before we went into the ghetto, I remember when we walked through the streets of Warsaw; if German soldiers walked on the same sidewalk, we had to step down.

Q: DID YOU HAVE OTHER FAMILY AROUND YOU -- GRANDPARENTS OR AUNTS AND UNCLES?

A: Yes. My whole family was living in Warsaw. I had a grandfather. My mother had a few sisters, (Ganielle), (Rosia), (Mila), (Helena), four sisters and a brother (Heinich). My aunt (Ganielle) was very wealthy. They were millionaires and owners of a factory in Poland, nails and screws and hardware factory. They had two sons. My mother's brother was married and he had one daughter named (Nina/Ninka). She was about maybe eights years old. My aunt (Mila) was married and had a son (Niko), also around that age. That was my mother's family. My father had a sister living and his older sister living in Warsaw. She was the one who actually raised him. My father was the youngest of a family of eight children, and he became an orphan at a young age. He was really raised by his older sister (Bella) who had two sons and a daughter. I don't remember the boys' names, but the daughter is named (Helena). She survived and

she lives in Los Angeles. She's 15 years older than me.

Q: WHAT ABOUT YOUR GRANDPARENTS?

A: My grandfather lived in the ghetto too. He was remarried. He was a widower; my grandmother passed away and he remarried and had another child with his second wife (Franya). This is my only aunt that has survived the war and she eventually immigrated to Israel. I was with her there. My aunt (Franya) had two children also, (Uric) and (Arooka), who are living right now in Israel. My aunt passed away already. Well, this is the recollection I have. That's what I know about my family.

The next thing that I remember is being actually in a ghetto. I don't know where we were living. We were living in many places. I was usually just with my mother. My father was always, always somewhere trying to make a little money and to bring some food because immediately there

was hunger. I know that my brother was not around. From what my mother was telling me later, I know that he rebelled very much. He did not want to stay in a ghetto. He use to say that he will not live like an animal behind walls, locked up, and he will get out, somehow he will manage to get out. What he did is he sold his bar mitzvah suit and that way had a little money, and that enabled him to buy through some underground channels a false identity card. That way he was able to go what we call "the other side" -- that means out of the ghetto. We refer to it always "the other side."

Q: WAS HE IN THE UNDERGROUND?

A: Well, we didn't know anything. Later on, years later, we found out that he was in the underground. He joined a Polish underground. He had an identity card with the name of (Marian Peerdrofski), and his age was showing as 19 years old. But he was actually at that time, I think, 15? He would come once in a while. I remember

he would come into the ghetto, and I know that he would come through the sewer pipes. He would bring some food to us and he would bring a loaf of white bread for my grandfather because he couldn't eat the ghetto bread, which was heavy like cement.

Then our daily life was a preoccupation day and night with hiding. The survivor was to find some food and to hide from the Germans because they had all the time blockades that we Polish would call the "(blockada)" -- that means truckloads of German soldiers would suddenly come from nowhere, unexpectedly, any time of the day or night, and they would spill into the streets, hundreds and hundreds of soldiers with dogs, big German Shepherds, and with rifles ready to shoot. They would catch people, anybody, wherever they could find them. They would drag them out of houses. They would break in the doors and just catch anyone, a child, or an old person, or whoever it was in the street, in a store, just everywhere. We lived with that

constant fear of just looking and being aware and always in the back of the mind thinking about a place to hide.

Q: YOU HAD NO SET HOME FOR YOURSELF?

A: No. We were moving around for a while. I think we were together with my father in some room someplace and there were some other people nearby.

I remember my father came home one day and he told my mother that a friend of his confided in him that he had some information and he knew that there will be a blockade, and he has a safe place to hide and he thinks that same thing for me and my mother. So what the plan was, he said that this man was informed that the Germans ordered some kind of carpentry work to make desks, and he needed ten people to do this job. He suggested to my father if he would join them, pretend to be a carpenter, that would make it safe for him to survive that time. He said to my mother that she could dress up like a cleaning lady and sweep the shop, and they wouldn't take her and I. There

was a plan for a whole group of people to hide in that workshop. There was an opening in the ceiling, I guess an attic, but it was invisible; you couldn't really see. There would be a whole group of people hiding there. He said my mother would be a cleaning lady and I would hide with the rest of the people up there. My mother was very scared. She says "I cannot do that. I have to be together with Nelly. I am afraid to face them. I can't. I want to hide with Nelly." So we climbed up there. They put a table and they put a big ladder up there, and we climbed up there. There was a big group of people. There were no children except myself and somebody had a little, tiny baby. They said that this baby was the child of one of the Jewish policemen who was working in the streets there, patrolling downstairs. There was a tiny, little window out to the street. We were all huddled together there and we sat very quietly. Very shortly afterwards, we heard the trucks and the soldiers and barking of the dogs, and the backs of the rifles they would knock on the walls and on the

floors, and screaming. Suddenly the baby started crying. There was just panic up there and they couldn't shut the baby up. People started talking that there are 30 of us, very young people and there is one little baby. They were making plans to shut the baby up permanently. There was a woman, she had a cucumber with her and she took that out, and she says "Here, let the baby suck on this. Maybe that will help." And that's what happened. The baby was hungry, and it was sucking on the cucumber and it stayed quiet. We were all sitting trembling terribly because we were very scared. We heard dogs barking. We knew that if they found us there, we would be shot on the spot. There was terrible fear. Suddenly, we heard more commotion and more noise. We heard somebody calling my father's last name, calling "(Ziegler), (Ziegler), come out. Nothing will happen to you," in Polish. "Come out. I promise nothing will happen to you." My mother started crying and she said "Oh my God! What happened to him? What are they doing? Why?" Well, this went on for a while,

and then we didn't hear anything. We didn't hear his name being called anymore. We peeked out the window and we saw hundreds of people lined up in the streets, and the soldiers surrounding them all with rifles, and screaming and crying and commotion and panic. Then it all quieted down. They all went away. We stayed there for a long time, still afraid to come down until we heard the voice of the Jewish policeman knock up in the ceiling. He said "It's safe. You can all come out now." My mother ran to him crying "Tell me what happened to my husband. What happened to him?" He said that in the last minute the soldiers rounded up all the people that worked in that carpentry shop. My father at the last moment ran away to hide someplace in the courtyard. There was a pile of hay and that was the only place. He climbed and covered himself, but he heard the supervisor of the carpenters calling his name. He said that he had a list of ten workers, and the German says "If you don't get the tenth man, I'll shoot you on the spot." Apparently, he said my father came out because

they were checking with bayonets in the hay. According to him, my father came out and he joined the rest of the people in the street. We never heard from him again. I never saw my father again [voice breaking]. This was 1942. It must have been in summertime because it was warm weather. I think maybe it was June.

Well, we went on. Mother and I kept on hiding wherever we could.

Q: CAN YOU REMEMBER HOW SHE MANAGED TO FIND HIDING PLACES?

A: No. I know that a lot of buildings were already abandoned because people were taken away. There were all kinds of empty places. It looked like after maybe an atomic bomb, destruction and empty places and broken furniture and things thrown all over. People would just take up a little place, somewhere in a room, someone's kitchen. Who lived there? Who was there? I don't know. Nobody knows. But that's how we were living. I

remember one particular place in a big building that my mother and I occupied, a little kitchen. There was a whole group of people that occupied a big room. It was a really large room, and there were some other little bedrooms. Everybody would walk through the kitchen. We would stay for a while until we had to go somewhere else.

Q: DO YOU KNOW HOW SHE CAME BY GETTING FOOD?

A: We were pretty much starving. My mother had a few things. I know we would carry some things with us, a suitcase and belongings. My mother would sell things whenever she could and buy a loaf of bread. When we were living in that kitchen, it was cold and freezing and we had no fuel to heat in the wood oven. Nearby there was I guess a bakery and they would deliver wood. She sent me at night to steal some wood from there, and we would heat the oven or we would break some furniture and burn that to warm ourself or heat some water. My mother would heat water to wash me and wash my hair because I was

basically infested with lice from being with children, occasionally playing with them when I could.

I remember a time when we were living in some apartment. I was with my mother. It was high, maybe third, fourth floor. This must have been at the beginning, in the ghetto. My mother had a neighbor who she befriended next door, and they would get together and talk. That lady told my mother that if you're ever caught in a blockade and you are marched to the Umschlagplatz, which was the railway station, to be shipped out, she says "Once you are together lined up with people (and they always made everybody run), don't try to buy time and don't run with the rest of the people. Take a few steps back. Try to end up at the end of the hall. Go." My mother asked her "Why?" This lady explained to my mother "Once you arrive to the Umschlagplatz, if you are among the last people, then chances are that the trains are going to be filled up and you have a chance. You will have to wait maybe for another train, or

maybe there won't be any more trains, and that way you can go back." My mother remembered that; and that's exactly how it happened one time.

I don't know where we were, but they caught us. There was a blockade. We were lined up first of all in the courtyard and then with all the hundreds of other people in the streets, surrounded by soldiers with their rifles in a shooting position. They would make everybody run and people would fall over each other. My mother held my hand very tight. Everybody was running, and she was walking back a little bit. I was just terrified. I cried and I said "They would shoot us. I'm afraid they would shoot us." She was very tough with me. She said "Shut up. You have to do what I'm telling you to do. We will survive that way." I was just always very terrified. But my mother forced me and we were among the last people. When we got to the Umschlagplatz, I remember a huge terminal, railway station. I remember white tiles. There were children abandoned in baby carriages, sick

people sitting on the floor. We were waiting in line and the trains came. They filled up with people, and then another train came and filled up again. There was a small group of us left and we waited in the Umschlagplatz. We stayed there until it was dark. This started in the morning, early. Toward the end, it was very dark already. There was a small group of us left and I don't remember any soldiers or anybody. I know we all scattered and we ran. Nobody else was with us, just my mother and I. We walked through the streets of Warsaw. It was dark and it was very quiet. There was no nobody around. Open windows and bedding hanging out through the windows. There were German soldiers riding through the streets on motorcycles or in their cars and shooting in the air, and it was very terrifying. We would walk against the buildings, hiding in the shadows. Every time we heard some vehicle coming, we would run into a building. We made our way back, I don't know where, but back. I think this was prior to when my father was taken away, that was earlier because I remember

the next day we were walking in the streets and my father was running toward us. He wore a light-colored shirt and a pair of pants and no jacket. He ran with his arms open, and he said "Thank God. Thank God you survived," and he embraced us. I don't know where he was, but that's the experience we had.

Before they took my father away, I remember when he was sick in the ghetto. He had typhus. He was very, very sick. He was hallucinating and he wanted to walk out from the balcony on the fourth floor. My mother would fight with him to restrain him, to keep him. I know he was saying "I have to go. I have this appointment. I have this business to attend." She would physically force him to stay in bed. She took care of him and somehow he recuperated from typhus. Then I was sick with typhus. I don't remember how I recuperated.

Q: ANY MEDICATION?

A: No. There were no doctors, no medicines; I don't remember anything like that. Of course, he was very weak after the typhus, and we didn't have enough food. I remember going to my aunt -- that's my father's sister, (Bella), the one that raised him -- and we went to her and she was still in her apartment. I remember walking upstairs. My mother asked her to feed him something, my father. He was so weak and he needed a little food.

Q: WERE YOU IN THE GHETTO AT THAT TIME?

A: Yes. It was all in the ghetto.

Q: YOUR AUNT WAS OUTSIDE THE GHETTO?

A: No, everyone was in the ghetto. The only one that was outside was my brother. I don't remember him coming over; this was very seldom. At the beginning he was more or less on a regular

basis, when we were still all together with my father and he knew where we were living, when it was still the same apartment that we occupied. But once they took my father away and once we started moving around, we lost contact with my brother and he couldn't find us.

Q: [UNIDENTIFIED MALE] WHAT YEAR WAS THE UMSCHLAGPLATZ?

A: The Umschlagplatz, when I was with my mother, I don't know if it was the beginning of '42, but right around that time because I know that my father was taken away in summer '42 and that was earlier. I don't know how much earlier.

My grandfather came to live with us. At that time, my mother was working in a a soup kitchen. The soup kitchen was set up in a workshop for tailors. There were tailors working there and sewing uniforms or something for the Germans. My mother would sit there all day long or into the night peeling potatoes. Most of the time I would

stay home alone. She was working a lot at night, and I remember I stayed home by myself. I remember my grandfather came to stay with us. He had a very hard time. He was starving. Once in a while my brother, when he came over, brought a loaf of white bread for my grandfather because that was the only thing he could have. I remember my grandfather getting up in the morning and putting his (tallas) on and did (feelum). He would wrap it around his hand and stood by the window, and he would pray, and he would pray, and he would pray. My grandfather was a religious Jew. My grandparents were not orthodox. He had a tiny, little beard. [Large sigh]

Q: WAS YOUR FAMILY PRACTICING?

A: No. Not my parents. My mother came from a religious family, as was my grandfather and my grandma. My parents kept kosher and they were following the tradition. My grandfather always wore a hat or a (keepah). He would pray every

day, but not my parents. They didn't keep kosher at home and they were pretty much free.

After a while, when my grandfather was living with us, my mother was away working in that kitchen. I remember I played with some children in the area. I think there were two little boys, older than me, and they were left alone too. We were playing on the staircase in the building. I remember we were pretending we have a birthday party. We have some kind of a party. This little boy came and he brought a couple slices of bread and honey, and so we spread that honey. I don't remember seeing honey. I hardly knew what honey was. We spread that honey on the bread and we cut it in tiny pieces, and we just had a wonderful time. I think we were playing maybe store; we were selling food. Somehow I made my way into the place where this boy was living, in the apartment. There was a wardrobe cabinet, and I opened the door and I looked inside. It was filled with food, stuffed with food. Not food ready to eat, but there were dry foods, beans,

flour, and there was a bottle of honey. I took the bottle of honey, and I ran home and I gave it to my mother. My grandfather was around. Apparently that bottle of honey was like a bottle of gold because we did not have any sugar. We did not have any. The only thing I remember having there was that bread and, once in a while, a little soup that my mother would bring from the soup kitchen and a few teaspoons of jelly that they would ration out. Whenever my mother came home after working all night, she would bring that little container with soup. When she came into the door, I grabbed it. "Let me taste" I would say, "Let me taste," and she would let me taste it. I took a few swallows and bites and it was gone, it was all gone. I ate the whole thing because I was so hungry. My poor mother would cry because there was nothing left for her. Anyway, I showed up at home with a bottle of honey and it meant life, survival. My grandfather told my mother "Take that honey and hide it outside the apartment because they will look for it. She will blabber. You can't trust

children." She listened to his advice, and she took that bottle and she left the apartment. I don't know where she went, someplace. She hid the bottle of honey. The next day or so, police came to our apartment, Jewish police. They were in civilian clothes. They said that this boy's mother was smuggling food and that was her business. She was going to the outside of the ghetto and buying and selling things. He said "Your daughter stole something from this place, a bottle of honey." They wanted to question me. I remember they picked me up and they sat me down on the table. My mother stood next to me, and they started interrogating me. "Did you take that bottle?" I said "Yes." My mother said "She doesn't know what she's saying. I never saw any bottle." Then they sent her out of the room, and they questioned me and they scared me. I was terrified. They threatened and they said "You better tell us. Did you take?" I said "Yes." "Where is it?" I said "Well, let me look. It must be here. I think maybe it's there." They looked there but they didn't find it. I said

"Well maybe over there." They went all through the whole apartment and they couldn't find it. My mother was very angry, and she came in the room and she said "What are you doing to my child. You're scaring her and she doesn't know what she's saying. They were all playing. I didn't see anything." Eventually they left. I guess they tried to keep law and order in the ghetto.

Q: THE CABINET WITH THE FOOD, WASN'T THAT KIND OF OBVIOUS?

A: It was all locked up. The boy, I don't know if I got the key from him or I just saw it and I took it because that was food. I gave it to my mother because we were all hungry. We all looked for something to put in our mouths.

My grandfather didn't stay very long with us. He was not very happy there because I would eat his white bread. He would hide it and I would find it. I would always break off, and in no time it

was all gone. Then he would be hungry. He told my mother that he has to go. He would go live with his other daughter, my aunt (Rosia).

Q: WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO HIS WIFE?

A: She died a natural death before the war. His second wife, I don't know what happened to her, but I know that he was on his own at that time [large sigh].

I remember my mother continued working in that soup kitchen. She was working days and I was going with her. There was a whole group of women sitting there and peeling potatoes. I guess children were not allowed there. There were no other children. Every time a German would come and inspect everything, they would hide me someplace under a table. I would run out in the street and hide in some doorways. When they went away, I would come back and stand at the table. When there was a chance, my mother would take potatoes and stuff it in my clothing. One time,

I think I wore a pair of pants and she tied it and she would make me run away with these potatoes and take them to the place where we were living and hide it there. There was a terrible battle between my mother and me because I was scared. I was terrified. I didn't want to steal because I was afraid they would kill me if they catch me. And I remember my mother would say to me "If we don't do it, we're going to starve to death. We will die. You better do it." So I would run a few times a day back and forth with these potatoes. Eventually we accumulated a very nice amount of potatoes. My mother would come home and she would cook soups and there was food. We were eating and we felt stronger. Mother knew [laughs].

Q: HOW DID SHE COME BY THAT JOB? IT SOUNDS LIKE IT WAS A GOOD JOB.

A: I'm not sure but I think maybe because my mother's older sister, (Ganielle), who was this very rich woman, she came to see my mother once,

and she says "Well, I don't know how you are going to survive. You don't have any skills. They have these workshops and they have tailors, so why don't you pretend that you know how to sew on the machine." And my mother says "I never touched a sewing machine. I don't know how. I can't." And she says "Well, I got a job there. This way I can survive maybe." Maybe it was her suggestion, find something in a kitchen. That's possible. I don't remember seeing my aunt, but I remember her talking about it. "You have to get busy and work so this way you can survive. If you're just by yourself in an apartment on the street, they will catch you and they will ship you out."

Q: [UNIDENTIFIED MALE] DID YOUR MOTHER WORK BEFORE THE WAR?

A: No. She never worked. She never did any work except being housewife and mother.

I don't know how the job ended, but everything ended and we always moved again. There we were all by ourselves.

Before that, my aunt, my mother's sister, (Rosia), came to visit us. She said to my mother "Father and I, we are going to go voluntarily to the Umschlagplatz because they are going to give us a loaf of bread and some jelly. They are going to relocate us. We are going to work in those places. We can't make it anymore. We are starving." She said this was the plan for my aunt (Rosia) and my grandfather -- to go. They said good-bye to each other and they went. I never saw them again. [Drinks from glass]

Q: SEEMS LIKE YOU MUST HAVE BEEN A VERY DISCIPLINED CHILD TO BE QUIET THROUGH ALL THOSE EPISODES WHERE YOU HAD TO BE TOTALLY QUIET.

A: Oh yes.

Q: AND YOU FOLLOWED EVERY WORD YOUR MOTHER SAID.

A: Oh yes! I was a child, but I behaved like an adult when I had to. Yes. We had to. The fear made me listen to whatever my mother [cough] said. Excuse me. [Coughing spell]. Can we stop?

[TAPE STOPPED]

I have a feeling that I'm not telling you everything in sequence. These are the pictures that I have in my mind. When what happened is hard for me to say exactly, but I will tell you the memories that I have.

I remember an incident where I was walking in the street with my mother. We were going to meet my brother who was coming from the other side. We met him someplace in the street and he gave us some eggs, broken. My mother had a cup in her hand and there were a couple eggs that were cracked in that cup. My brother left, and we were walking back home in the street, and my

mother held that cup in her hand. Suddenly she was attacked by an old man who was half naked. He looked crazy. He looked insane, with a beard and starved eyes. He stuck his hands in the cup and pulled everything out and straight in his mouth [demonstrates] and he ran away.

Q: [UNIDENTIFIED MALE] WHAT WAS YOUR BROTHER DOING? HOW COULD HE BE OUTSIDE?

A: I was talking about it before. My brother was nine years older than me. He managed to get false identity papers. He was not in the ghetto. He was outside of the ghetto since almost the beginning because he rebelled. He was a young man, and he didn't want to be locked up in a ghetto. He said "I'm going to be free. I'm going out." At that time, he joined the Polish underground, but we didn't know anything about it. Occasionally he would come into the ghetto. He would buy things from the Jewish people. There was this black market going on all the time. The Poles would come, and they would buy

from the Jews. They would bring a loaf of bread or some money or something. That's how my brother was surviving also. I think that he specialized in something. I remember my mother said he was buying the heads only of sewing machines. He would smuggle that out from the ghetto. He would buy it for food or money, and he would take it to the Polish side and sell it. That's how he survived and that's how he made a living. We had no information. He never confided in anyone, not to my mother or to my father earlier that he was in the underground, smuggling and buying and selling and so on. He was living on the Polish side in an apartment with a Polish woman who had two daughters. Her name was (Mrs. Ellavine). I don't remember the street address. At one time, I know that it was almost across from we were staying. In other words, we were on this side in the ghetto in a building, and there was this big wall, and the apartment where he was living was the next street over, on the other side.

Q: WHAT ABOUT THIS CRAZED MAN?

A: He came, and he was crazed from hunger like so many other ones. He had still enough life in him to grab something and steal that. Normal sight in a ghetto. I remember, if you walked the street, you saw children begging, beggars everywhere, starved, on the verge of death. There were a lot of corpses, many children and babies swollen and covered with a newspaper and a rock on top. That was a normal sight, and we would walk by.

One time my mother, I don't know why, but she needed to place me somewhere in a safe place. She went with me to apparently a kindergarten, and we stood in line to go in there. There were other children inside. While we were still in the street lined up to get inside, a woman walked by, and she stopped in the street and started talking to my mother. She says "How come? What are you doing in this line?" My mother said that she wanted to place me there for a while. She said "Well, you shouldn't." She says "Look at

these poor children. Your daughter is in better shape. You are taking care of her. These children are not safe here. They don't have anybody. Why don't you stay together with your daughter?" My mother said "You know, you're right, I shouldn't." And so we walked away. A while later, we found out that whole school, that whole little kindergarten was taken away, all of the children that were placed there.

One time, I spent a day or an hour among children. It was some type of school or babysitting. When my mother picked me up, they shaved my head completely because I was infested with lice. I remember my mother crying because I had beautiful long hair. They put a scarf, and I remember my mother said "Oh my God, look at this. There's lice climbing through the scarf." And that in spite of my mother always taking such good care of me. Whenever there was a chance, she would heat up water; there were no showers, there were no bathtubs, there was a sink sometimes, and we would heat water. She scrubbed

me with this laundry soap, and she would scrub my hair. She would wash my hair with petroleum, lighter fluid, to kill the lice.

Q: HOW DID YOU SPEND THE DAYS WHEN YOU WERE LEFT ALONE?

A: For a while, I remember being alone in that apartment, but that was mostly at nighttime. During the day, I don't know, I was always with my mother. If I was on my own, I would venture out to play a little bit if there were still any children. But that must have been at the beginning. We would play in the apartment building on the stairs or in the courtyard, but just at the very beginning. Later on, there were no children to play with. The only thing we did is try to stay safe and hide and try to feed ourselves. There was nothing else in our life, just to survive another day and another day and make it through this blockade and that blockade. They were all the time. They were constant.

Another time we were caught, I don't know whether I was with my mother, but we were caught in a blockade. We hear they are coming and the soldiers and the commotion. We ran into a building and we ran up the stairs. We heard the soldiers behind us and there was nowhere to go. There was an open door. My mother and I hid behind that door against the wall, right behind the door, and there comes this young soldier running up the stairs. He saw us, and he had his rifle pointed at us. He yelled in Russian "[Speaks Russian] Get out, get out. I'm going to shoot." My mother spoke perfect Russian. We walked out from that door and we lifted our hands. My mother said "[Speaks Russian] Don't shoot, don't shoot. We are going, we are going." He chased us down the stairs to the street, and we joined all the other people that were lined up there. There were a lot of people. We were running toward the Umschlagplatz, and the technique that worked the first time, for some reason, we couldn't make it like the first time. We ended up in the Umschlagplatz. I

remember it seemed to me like there were thousands of people. There were trains there ready too, and there were soldiers all over. There was an officer that stood right in front of the train. He looked very polished and shined, and he didn't say anything. He was pointing one way and he was pointing the other way. People would pass by him, one after the other. They were lined up, I think, in fours. I think this was the time when my mother was still working in that kitchen. He was sending people into the train, pointing toward the train all the old people and the children. The younger people who were stronger and still good to work, like my mother, he would point to the other side. There were also Jewish policemen around making sure there was law and order because they didn't want to upset the Germans, and they thought they would save their skin by doing that. Well, anyway, my mother and I arrived in front of this officer, and he pointed to me toward the train and my mother the other way; this took maybe a second, and then the other people pushed from behind. My

mother grabbed me, and she didn't pay attention. She ran with me the other way. She wore a very large raincoat. She took me underneath her raincoat, covered me, and she ran with me. The Jewish policeman was pursuing us. He ran. "He said for her to go that way and the German said she has to go to the train." I said "Please let me go. Please let me go." They got into a fight, and she was pushing him out of the way. "Let me go. Let me go with my child. Get out of my way." They were screaming and yelling at each other, and he gave up. My mother ran away with me to a small group of people on the side, and nobody noticed. There was such a commotion. There was so much going on nobody paid attention. We stayed again until the end of the day. It took many, many hours, and we walked back. We were saved at that time. We walked. It was a miracle that I got out.

Q: YOUR MOTHER'S PERSISTENCE?

A: Yes. She didn't care who it was. She wouldn't separate from me, even if God stood there, she wouldn't let go of me.

Well, we went back to the ghetto. We started moving on again to some places, hiding again. We didn't have contact with anybody anymore, not with any of our relatives. We didn't see my brother anymore. My mother would tell me "I wish I could find my son. If he knew where I am, he would save us. He would bring us food. I wish I could make contact with him." We were constantly hiding.

Another time there was again a blockade and people running and trying to hide, like mice that are poisoned, you know, in panic. I don't what that place was. It was a big room. There was a bed there and there was a door. Some people were running into that room and some other people were putting a big cabinet against the wall and

throwing things into the cabinet and bicycles on top of it to make it look like there is no door. A whole group of people ran in there, and we didn't know which way to go. My mother said "Go. Go into the bed, inside the bed." She started lifting the blankets and the mattress. There was another woman and she shouted "Get away from there. My children are there. Get away." We ran in panic. We went behind that door with the rest of the people and again the same thing, it was very quiet. We sat and we heard all the soldiers and the dogs and the shooting and the screaming and everybody sitting there trembling. Suddenly we heard somebody being beaten up and crying and screaming. These children were dragged out from that bed, from inside that bed. The woman, I don't know if they killed her on the spot, but we heard people being beaten up and cries and screaming. My mother said "My God! Thank God I didn't put you there. We would be all lost." She said "I couldn't survive if I knew that." Well anyway, we stayed there for a few hours and they didn't find us in there.

That's how close we came. We make it another time.

This must have been already 1943 or end of 1942. There were fewer and fewer people and it was very eerie. Even though it was terrible before, I think that there was a little bit of comfort because there were crowds, there were other people. But when it all became so isolated and so empty and people were disappearing, there was a terrible fear, and I felt it too. My mother would say that they had a lot of literature that they would print in Polish and Yiddish that would say come out, don't be afraid, we want to relocate you, and please get ready and do your laundry and pack your clothes, and you will be safe, and we will put you to work on farms and to work in factories and to calm people down. But somehow I don't think my mother believed all of that because she always wanted to hide. She was never contemplating giving herself up for anything.

Q: HOW DID YOU EAT IN THOSE DAYS?

A: I really don't know. I don't remember having food.

Q: OR WATER?

A: Sometimes in some places. Whenever there was a place that there was water, my mother would always scrub me, undress me and scrub me, always wash me.

Q: FOR DRINKING?

A: For drinking? I don't remember. I don't remember what food we had.

Q: [UNIDENTIFIED MALE] YOU WERE LIVING IN THE SAME APARTMENT NOW, OR YOU MOVED AROUND?

A: Oh, no. We were moving. I don't know where I was at. We were moving all the time, and very few people, and I was just with my mother. One

night, I remember, my mother maybe gave up. She felt lost. She started washing her laundry at night, and she said "Well, I'll prepare myself to be ready just in case." There were a few other people, and my mother would tell them about her son; if she just could make contact with him, he could save her because he looks Aryan -- he looks so Polish -- and he will survive the war. If she knew where he is, we could be safe. Other women would console her. "Don't worry. You'll find him. You're lucky to have a son that is on the outside and has Polish papers, identity papers." They were so envious, but my mother said "Well, where is he? I want to find him." One night, I was sleeping and my mother was washing laundry, and a young Polish woman, very young, maybe a teenager, blond girl, came and she says "You have anything to sell?" to my mother. My mother said "Yes. I have a lot of things. I will give them to you for free if you do me a favor." She said "Well, what can I do for you?" And my mother said "I know this Polish man. I know where he lives, and he owes me money. He is a friend of

the family from before the war. If he could find me, if he knew where I was, he would help us. He would bring us food. He would try to help us. All I want from you is to deliver a letter to him." She said "Sure, go ahead, write it down. I will deliver it." When she told her where he lived, she says "I'm right nearby. No problem. Just sit down and write the letter." So my mother sat down and she wrote "Dear (Mr. Marian): This is Mrs. (Ziegler). I am in a desperate situation. I'm alone with my daughter. Please come as soon as you can and help us. Sincerely, Mrs. (Ziegler)." She gave this letter to this young woman. She delivered the letter that same night to my brother. It was just a couple of streets away I guess from where we were. From what my mother was telling about that, she found my brother in the apartment and she gave him the letter. He opened it, and before he even read it he saw my mother's handwriting. My mother had a beautiful, very distinct handwriting. When he saw her handwriting, he almost fainted. His landlady

said to him "(Marian), what's the matter? What has happened? What's the matter?" He said to her "Oh (Mrs. Ellavine), you know this Jewish woman that was a friend of my parents before the war, I had no idea she's still alive. She's still with her daughter in the ghetto. They are starving. I must find her. I have to help her." So he came to us that same night. I didn't remember my brother and he changed so much. When he came, he was so tall. He looked like a young man, and he was so handsome. We fell in each other's arms [voice breaking], and my brother cried like a little child and said "I really don't want to live. My father is dead. I don't want to live." All the other ladies came and consoled him. "(Mr. Marian), you have a mother, you have a sister, you are so fortunate. You look so Polish. Control yourself." He regained his composure after he cried very much. He broke down terribly. He sat down with my mother and he told her about all the time that we didn't see each other. He said to her that he was convinced that we were dead. He knew the

Jews in the ghetto were being killed. We knew they were not going to a vacation place, but I don't remember anybody talking that, you know, they sent us to extermination camps. Nobody heard about that. But we knew that wherever they sent us is no good because nobody is coming back.

Q: DO YOU THINK YOUR MOTHER KNEW?

A: Yes. Hard to say. It was in the manner of the way they were transporting people. The fear was there that they wouldn't make it and because life was so cheap in the ghetto. I think deep in the heart they knew. I think my mother must have known. My brother (Marian) told my mother "I was so desperate. I was convinced that you and Nelly are dead. I started drinking with the other friends of mine. I was making a lot of money," he said, and "I didn't care about any of it. I was throwing the money, wasting it. I bought a motorcycle and I bought high boots (which was in style at that time). I drank a lot, Vodka, and I would waste most of my money." But he said

"Don't worry I will make it. I will sell the boots and I'll sell the motorcycle. I will save you, you will see. I will save you and Nelly." And everybody talked to him. "(Mr. Marian), maybe you can arrange something for me or for my daughter." They knew we were blessed to have him. He said he would arrange something to get us out of the ghetto, not to worry. Not to lose hope. He will come back for us. And he did. He got out of the ghetto and, through his connections in the underground, he obtained a false birth certificate for my mother. He couldn't get anything for me. He figured out a plan how to save us.

Q: WHAT A MIRACLE!

A: He had a brilliant plan, the only one that could have worked. There was no other plan that could have worked. This boy, a 16-year-old boy at that time, planned our survival. He came to the ghetto to my mother with a little bible, pocket-size bible, with a chain and a cross on it

for my mother, and with this identity papers and with a whole life history for my mother to memorize. He taught her and showed her which prayers to read and memorize in the bible. Her name on the certificate was (Antronina Fraukner). It said that she was a single woman and from what province she come from. He taught her about the area supposedly where she was born, the name of her priest, her church, and he prepared her for everything.

Q: WAS HER POLISH SPEAKING PERFECT?

A: Yes. My mother was educated well. She spoke perfect Polish, perfect German, and beautiful Russian.

But we looked Jewish. My mother didn't look so Jewish. I looked more Jewish. I had reddish hair. But we looked from the ghetto. We had the look like the people in the ghetto.

He told her that he's going to smuggle us out of the ghetto, and then he will arrange for us to be shipped out of Warsaw because there is no way that we can survive in Warsaw. The only place where we can survive, he said to my mother, is in the lion's mouth. This was the expression he used in Polish. "You will be safest in the lion's mouth." And she said "What do you mean?" He says "You will have to go to Germany." He says we cannot survive in Poland because every Pole will recognize you and will point to you and Nelly -- "A Jew, a Jew, a Jew."

We were supposed to be smuggled out of the ghetto on separate days. I was to go first and my mother the next day. He made preparations, and he paid (what is it called?) people on this side [Pause] . . .

Q: A BRIBE?

A: a bribe, yes, bribe. He bribed people inside the ghetto and bribed people on the outside of the

ghetto, and some Polish policemen. He said to my mother that he would be waiting for me late at night when there was total darkness, at a certain time. When we were supposed to show up, these people would be there on this location, near the wall. They will put a ladder and I will climb up. He would be waiting for me on the other side, and I will jump and he will grab me. That's how he would get me out, and we followed that plan. We went. It was very dark. We went to that place and there was a group of men there. They all stood hiding behind some doorways. Another group put a ladder up and told me "Climb up fast. Go up." I climbed all the way. My mother stood there too, and I climbed up. When I was all the way on the top, there was some shooting suddenly. Shots were fired. I froze and my mother froze. Everybody took off. Everybody ran away and my mother ran with them. Then she realized that she left me on the ladder and I heard the voice of my brother yelling "Jump. Jump now. Jump," and so I did. He caught me. He just grabbed me and he ran with me

into a building. We stayed there for a while hiding. Then we walked out in the street. It must have been middle of the night. There was nobody, very few people in the street. He went with me to some kind of a nightclub or a restaurant or a bar. It was very dimly lit. There were little tables and chairs like in a restaurant, and we sat in the corner. He ordered for me the biggest sandwich I ever saw in my life, and also a bowl of, it was beets, borscht, and potatoes. I don't remember seeing that kind of food. I had no recollection.

Q: IN YOUR WHOLE LIFE?

A: Yes, I think so. Going back a little bit before I am at the ghetto and early in the beginning of the ghetto, I don't know if this was not in our apartment where we lived, but in some other place, there were windows that were overlooking the wall. I could see the other side, the Polish side. I think this was the few times that my mother left me alone, and I was sitting on a

windowsill. I looked outside and I was observing the children in the morning on the other side. They would walk in the street and they were going to school. Some were carrying these things for books. Some other children were going to meet the milkman who was in the street with a horse and a buggy selling milk, and they came with these aluminum cans, and he would pour the milk in their cans. I was sitting and watching, and to me it looked like a movie, like the most wonderful sight I ever experienced. I thought what a wonderful life is there behind that wall. When my mother came home, I told her. I would also ask her if we are ever going to have enough bread to eat. "Will I be ever able to eat as much bread as I want?" She would always say "Yes, Nelly. You will see after the war. When the war ends, you can eat as much as you want."

That night after I was smuggled out and when I was sitting with my brother and after I finished eating, he started talking to me and explaining everything to me. He said "From this moment on,

you have to look at me like a strange man. You have to deny that I'm your brother because if anybody finds out, they will kill both of us. I want you to remember all of that so that you can save your life and we can all be safe." He explained to me that he would take me to the apartment where he lives with his Polish landlady, and I shouldn't speak to her, keep my mouth shut as much as possible, don't say anything and not to talk to him at all. He would go to another room where he sleeps, and that I shouldn't call him and I shouldn't call him by his name. I shouldn't call him for anything and just pretend that he's a stranger.

Q: DID YOU ALSO SPEAK GOOD POLISH?

A: I spoke Polish, yes. But my mother said that I'd picked up a little Yiddish accent in the ghetto from other children. My parents spoke Polish most of the time so there was no problem in communication.

I remember telling me also that if anybody would question me about him, I am supposed to say that he's a stranger. "I am a strange man and you don't know who I am. You don't know me at all. Even if they hold a knife to your throat, don't ever admit that I'm your brother." So I remembered that.

Q: YOU WERE ABOUT SEVEN THEN?

A: This was 1943 at the beginning, so in September of that year, I would have been eight.

I also forgot to tell you the preparation my mother made for me before I left the ghetto. She put lipstick on my cheekbones to give me some color in the face. She tied a handkerchief, scarf around my head and tied under my chin so I would look more like a Polish girl.

They brought me into that place where he lived, and basically it was a kitchen and it was also maybe third, fourth floor. We walked up all the

stairs. When we walked in, he left me there with this Polish lady and he went in the other room and I didn't see him anymore. I remember the kitchen. There was one window and I was looking down to the courtyard. I had a place to sleep on the floor, someplace in the corner, and I lied down. I remember the whole night this lady walked around and talked to herself and she prayed and she crossed herself all the time and walked around and prayed, and prayed, and prayed. The next day I looked out in the courtyard and there were children playing there. The moment nobody looked at me I tried to make my way out the apartment, downstairs. I wanted very, very much to play with the children. The landlady caught me walking down the stairs. "Oh yes, a _____" she said. She brought me back into the apartment.

Q: DO YOU KNOW WHAT HER UNDERSTANDING WAS OF WHO YOU WERE?

A: Yes. My brother told her, like the original story, that we were friends of his parents before

the war or neighbors and that he feels very sorry for us and he wants to save us because my mother was left alone with me. He asked her permission if we could stay with her just for a couple of days. He would make arrangements for us to get away from there, but he wants to help us. He wants to save us.

Q: [UNIDENTIFIED MALE] SO SHE KNEW THAT YOU WERE JEWISH?

A: She knew. She loved him very much. He was dating her daughter. She had two daughters. Her daughters were older than my brother, and he dated the girl who was about 19 years old. I have a picture of them walking in the street. She cared very much, this lady, for my brother because he was devoted. He would pay well. He would bring food to the house. He would protect them. She was a widow with these two daughters. She had no idea that he would be Jewish or anything, absolutely none. She had no suspicion at all. He would have his sort of secretive

life. He would disappear and maybe she knew that he was in the underground, this I don't know. My brother was really worried about this arrangement. I didn't look very much like my brother. I looked like my father. My brother looked a lot like my mother, the features. He was worried that she would recognize some resemblance. So, of course, he explained to my mother the same story that's she's not to speak to him and they have to act like strangers. My mother was supposed to come out the ghetto the next day, I guess late in the evening. This was a completely different occasion. She was not to climb the wall. She was to go through someplace where there was a fence and climb underneath a hole in the fence. Those were the arrangements. That was late afternoon I believe. He would wait for her on the other side. He explained to my mother that once she made her way out, she's not supposed to join him, just follow him. He would take a walk around the town just in case anybody saw anything or followed them, not to make any connections that these two people are together.

He told her what time, where to come and so on. My mother came to that place and she made her way underneath the fence. She had to climb. There was a Polish policeman on the Polish side and he would say to her "Come on. Come on. It's safe now. You can make it." He called "Cat" -- that's what they called the Jews because they were jumping fences and trying to hide and jumping around. They refer to the Jews like cats. He told her "It's okay. It's okay. You can come out now. It's safe." My mother got out and, the moment she was on the other side, he told her "You come with me." He forced her into a building, in the back. He told her "Give me everything you have. If not, I'm taking you to the Gestapo right now." He knew that she was being smuggled out of the ghetto and that she might have a little money with her, jewelry or something. She begged him "Please," but he said "On the spot, I will tell everybody that you are a Jew, and I'll take you to the Gestapo." Well, she took everything out that she had hidden on her, all the money, and she handed it to him and he let her go.

Q: HAD HE ALREADY BEEN BOUGHT OFF?

A: Yes, he was. I'm sure. It was not an accident that he was there and he was encouraging her to go. My brother was aware of everything, but he stayed away and he waited. My mother came out and they followed this plan. He was walking all over and she would follow him all over town. He was smoking cigarettes, one after the other. Finally, they got together in some place, the way it was planned. My mother said "My God, do you know what happened to me?" He says "I saw everything. I saw everything. Keep cool. Don't get nervous. Doesn't matter. I couldn't come because it was too dangerous. Then we would both be in trouble." They went to the apartment and my mother joined me. I was happy to see her. My brother locked himself again behind that door which I remember was very painful to see him go behind the door and not to talk to him. This poor Polish woman never stopped praying. She didn't sleep nights because she knew that if anybody would discover us, if the Germans would

find out, I mean if any of the residents of that apartment building, any of the Poles would know, they would run to the Germans because if the Germans would find out, they would execute all the residents of that apartment building. There was no doubt about it. They would all be killed for hiding Jews.

Q: SO (MRS. ELLAV[E]NE)?

A: (Ellav[i]ne), yes.

Q: (ELLAVINE) KNEW YOUR MOTHER WAS JEWISH?

A: She knew this was a mother and daughter, Jewish, from the ghetto and that he, the friend of the family trying to save us from the Germans so we wouldn't be killed, she knew that. He promised her that we wouldn't stay there very long. He would make arrangements to get rid of us in a couple of days or so.

Q: [UNIDENTIFIED MALE] DID SHE HAVE A HUSBAND? WAS SHE MARRIED?

A: My mother?

Q: [UNIDENTIFIED MALE] NO, THIS WOMAN.

A: No, she was a widow. She was living there with her two daughters in that apartment.

The plan was for my mother to go to the Gestapo office in Warsaw and sign up voluntarily to go to work in Germany, to be sent to work in Germany in a factory or on a farm. They had this office set up for Poles, mostly young men that couldn't survive, couldn't make a living in Warsaw, and if they wanted, they could sign up to go work in Germany on a farm or in a factory. My brother explained this to my mother. He said she was prepared with the documents. She memorized the prayers and her whole life history, this fictitious life. He told her to do it. To keep cool and be calm and say that she is in a

desperate situation with no job and no food. She has a little girl, a niece, her sister's daughter that survived. The parents were killed in a bombing and she's taking care of me, and could she be sent to Germany to work on a farm. She says "I cannot go in the Gestapo office. I cannot face them." She says "They will know. They will look at my face. They will know I am Jewish. They will find out. On the spot, they will kill me." Well, this went on for a few days. It dragged on and on because my mother couldn't find the courage to do it. They would go out and he would take my mother to that place. He would tell her where to go. He would wait away from there and kind of watch from afar. A couple of times my mother went and turned back. She couldn't go through with it. She cried, and she says "I'm dead. They will kill me on the spot. I can't do it." He talked to my mother like a father would talk to a daughter, a child. "This is your only chance. You cannot survive the war. You see what's happening here? Everybody will recognize you.

Everybody will recognize Nelly. You must go to Germany. The Germans don't distinguish between a Jew and a Pole. To them, they don't know. You will find work there, and this is the only safe place for you." Finally, I think on her third try, my mother did that. She followed every step that he told her to. Every word that he taught her, she just repeated everything, word by word. What he told her to say, my brother, that's what she said. He stood outside he said 1/2 hour or 45 minutes, or how long that took there. My mother said he smoked two packages of cigarettes waiting. Finally she came out. She got some papers, and they told her to report to the railway station on such and such a day, that there will be a train taking us to Berlin.

Q: HOW DOES YOUR BROTHER KNOW THAT PEOPLE ARE ACTUALLY BEING TRANSPORTED TO WHERE THEY SAID THEY WERE GOING TO TAKE THEM?

A: To Germany?

Q: YES.

A: Oh, well, he had no guarantees or anything. They told my mother they would send her to Berlin, and that's what she told him. That's what he knew. Eventually when we arrived, she corresponded with him. We did maintain contact with him.

(Mrs. Ellavine) was very relieved to find we were leaving. My brother took us to the railway station in Warsaw, maybe 24 hours before the departure of the train. They told us we had to go through some inspections and make sure everybody's healthy and doesn't have lice and diseases and things like that. After the war, my mother figured out this was probably the reason why my brother didn't come with us. Because of that health inspection, they would examine the body from the top to the bottom, and they would see that he was circumcised. That was probably the reason he didn't go through with a plan like that. He took us to the railway station and he gave us some food, bread and salami and packages,

and we said good-bye. He said that the next day, before the departure, he would come again and say good-bye to us. He was instructing my mother again, "Don't mix yourself with other people. Try not to talk to anybody. Don't let Nelly open her mouth, and stay by yourself as much as possible." I didn't tell you that he also found a name for me. He told me that from now on my name is not Nelly (Ziegler), but my name is going to be (Staniswava Saguyska), and I have to memorize this name. That's the name that I'm going to go by and this is not my mother, this is my aunt, but if I want, I can call her mama. We ended up in that railway station. There was a large group of people talking and joking, mostly young people and mostly men, a few, not too many, women. It was a happy atmosphere sort of.

Q: [UNIDENTIFIED MALE] DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT TIME OF YEAR IT WAS?

A: This must have been in March, yes. It was because I know my mother said a month before the

uprising in the ghetto, in Warsaw, and that happened in April. Didn't it? I think so. I think April 19.

Q: WERE PAPERS EVER FOUND FOR YOU?

A: No. My mother said this story that I'm her sister's daughter and the whole family was killed in a bombing. I have no one, and so she takes care of me, and if she could take me, and they permitted her.

Q: DID SHE DESCRIBE FOR YOU HOW IT WAS WHEN SHE WENT INTO THE GERMAN OFFICE TO REGISTER TO GO TO BERLIN?

A: No. I think that she was in a trance. I don't think she had much recollection of that except that fear and that panic she felt in her heart. She was just basically repeating everything that my brother told her to say. She followed that script. She didn't remember very much about that, but she knew she was terrified. She feared

that she would just collapse there and everybody would know who she is or where she came from. It was sheer terror because that's how we all felt seeing a German uniform in the ghetto.

We slept on a wooden platform. I remember it was wood, rough wood. I slept next to my mother. We woke up in the morning and we're all sore and waiting there to be processed and all of that. The next day, my brother came. Before they let him see us, he was called to the station manager, the supervisor of that station. Apparently we stood out. We didn't fit with the rest of the group. We were a little different and they sensed it, the Polish people. They were praying when they went to sleep. I didn't do that. My mother didn't do that. We were a little different and so somebody went to this station manager to tell him "You know we think we have a Jewish woman and a Jewish kid here, maybe you want to do something about that." When my brother showed up and the manager called him, he said "Are you visiting this woman and girl?" He

said "Yes." He said "Do you know they are Jewish?" My brother said to him "Yes. How much do you want?" This man told my brother "I don't want any money from you. I'm a socialist. I will just give you advice for them. Tell them to keep their mouths shut and not to talk to anybody and they will be all right."

Q: WHAT LUCK!

A: Yes. Well you see, wherever we went and wherever my brother went, nobody ever suspected him. He had that air about him. I mean, he acquired the mannerism and the behavior and the speech from the people in the underground. He lived with them and he intentionally wanted to acquire this behavior. So with the smoking and the drinking and the clothes that he wore, the boots, he did look Polish. He didn't look like a Jewish boy, a typical Jew. He was very tall. He was over six feet tall at that time, very slim. He did not look like this typical Jewish boy from a ghetto. Nobody would ever suspect him.

Q: DID HE HAVE BLUE EYES ALSO?

A: My brother had medium-dark hair, wavy hair, very light complexion. I think the color of his eyes was greenish, sort of like of mine, grayish-green. Very handsome. Very slim, long legs, long arms, very tall. I have a son now, who is my younger son, who reminds me of my brother. He is 6' 4". He's close to his height. His smile reminds me of my brother.

We finally made it into the train going to Berlin. There were seats for two people here and two people on the other side in the train, and we sat by the window. They gave us a loaf of bread and a jar of jelly for the trip, and we left for Germany. The people who faced us were in a talkative mood and to my mother they said "Why doesn't (Stasha) say the prayer?" Because when the train started rolling, some of them, not everybody, would say the prayer. She would say "Come on (Nanastasha), do it. Say your prayers." I didn't know what my mother was

talking about. She said "She's such a terrible, stubborn kid. She never does what I tell her to," and that's how we got away with it [laughing].

Q: [UNIDENTIFIED MALE] DID YOU UNDERSTAND HER?

A: Oh yes. I guess I did, but you know I never practiced this you see. I guess my brother didn't prepare me for that. I didn't know anything about the prayer. I saw other people do that and I didn't have an understanding at all about it. I didn't live among Christians. I lived among Jews so I just didn't know.

On the trip during the train ride, I remember that I would whisper in my mother's ear all the time "I forgot my name. What is my name?" [Laughing] And she would say "It's (Staniswava Saguyska)" every so often. I would say to her "What is my name?" Finally, I don't know how long the trip took but we arrived. We passed some big lamps and they were shining all over.

Everybody had to undress completely and they were checking the whole body and everything. They made pictures of my mother, of everybody, grown-ups, not me. They gave her what is called, I think, a (Ken Card), like an identification paper. They showered us. I had that picture and I cannot find it. I had that certificate. Maybe it is someplace in my house. I looked at it a few years ago, so I remember it well. It said (Antronina Fraukner). The picture of my mother with her hair wet, all put back, and she just looked like a skeleton from a concentration camp. They're all like that -- her cheekbones coming out. She had a number here on her chest. It was like they take a picture of a prisoner and that was her I.D. paper. It was stamped in German.

Q: WERE YOU LESS THIN THAN ANYONE ELSE ON THAT TRIP?

A: Oh yes, we were. I know we were because the people on the other side looked normal to us.

Q: WASN'T THAT OBVIOUS THAT YOU HAD A DIFFERENT KIND OF LIFE? DIDN'T THAT MAKE THEM SUSPICIOUS OF YOU?

A: I don't remember faces really of the people that were right around us, but generally I remember an impression of everything. Everything looked normal. Everything outside the ghetto looked normal to me. Everything in the ghetto looked different, was different.

[TAPE 2]

As I was saying, I remember the pictures in the ghetto, the people and the streets. It was a different world than what I saw when I came out of the ghetto because on the other side there were people walking in the street and they were dressed in normal clothes. People were walking hand in hand. There were children, and it was just different, totally different.

Q: HAD YOUR HAIR GROWN OUT BY THEN?

A: Oh yes. When they shaved my head, that was a few years before.

Q: AND HOW ABOUT THE LICE? DID YOU GET RID OF THE LICE?

A: I think so, yes. My mother was really looking after me. Every chance she had she would scrub me. I would cry and I would scream because she, especially my hair, she would comb it so rough. It was thick soap, laundry soap. It was cold. It was freezing in that open kitchen or open room someplace, all stripped naked. I guess it wasn't a pleasurable experience with people walking back and forth. I was many times rebelling. [Laughs] But basically I think I was a very good kid, and I behaved like a grown-up more or less. I cooperated with my mother. I was not mischievous because there was no time for such thoughts. I remember on rare occasions when I wanted so much to play and I wanted to be with

other children. When an opportunity came up and there were other kids around, we would invent some kind of a game and play a little bit and be like children for a while. This lasted a very short time at the beginning in the ghetto. For the rest of the time until we escaped, I don't remember having contact with any children at all. This game that I told you about and that episode when I stole the honey, this was all much earlier, at the beginning. After that, there was nobody around.

Q: IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAD NO CHILDHOOD AT ALL.

A: No I didn't, not at all. The only childhood I was able to capture a little, well quite a lot actually, was in Germany, but it was a lonely childhood. I was always by myself. I was in a dream world and I will tell you about that.

I also forgot to tell you about that time when my mother's brother passed away in our apartment. My mother's older brother had typhus and he was

recuperating. He wrote to my mother with the hope that she could feed him a little bit. He came to eat something. He came and he slept in the kitchen. He was still very sick I remember. We didn't have anything. We had sauerkraut that my father brought earlier, and so she opened that can of sauerkraut and he ate that. That was the only thing we had. He was very, very sick. A few days later, he died. They came to the house and they took his body, and they threw it on a communal wagon with other bodies that were collected.

Q: YOUR MOTHER TOOK CARE OF YOU WHEN YOU HAD TYPHUS, AND SHE TOOK CARE OF _____?

A: She didn't get sick. My mother was never sick in the ghetto. She did get sick later. When I was grown up, she told me that she stopped menstruating and the doctors told her because of malnutrition. She had a problem with the joints in her hand. She developed sores that wouldn't heal from malnutrition. Eventually it healed,

but she had a couple of fingers, two/three fingers, that remained crooked.

Q: HOW ABOUT YOUR HEALTH AFTER THE TIME YOU WENT TO GERMANY? WERE YOU _____? WERE YOU HAVING NIGHTMARES, OR ANY OTHER KIND OF PROBLEMS?

A: I don't remember being sick.

Q: EXCEPT WITH THE TYPHUS?

A: Right, mother said earlier. I don't even remember that. It was much earlier. It developed the beginning, I think _____. I don't remember anything about that.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT YOUR FATHER BEFORE HE LEFT?

A: My father, you mean in the ghetto, what he did or how he lived? We spent very little time with my father. I don't remember seeing him around. From the beginning, I don't know what he was doing to make some living or bring some food

home. I would see him sporadically. I don't remember. I just remember that time when we came back from the Umschlagplatz. Somehow he was in another location. We were separated and they took us to Umschlagplatz. He greeted us in the street "Thank God you're alive," and he run towards us. I remember his stretched arm and that white shirt, open-collared shirt.

Q: WAS THAT UNUSUAL TO HAVE AN OPEN-COLLARED SHIRT LIKE THAT?

A: I think so. I don't think I ever saw anybody. People were dressed basically in very dark clothes and trying to keep warm and overcoats and jackets and wintertime hats. This is the only way I remember my father at that time, that day, in that open collar, sort of a shirt like that with sleeves pulled up and open collar. Can't remember other instances.

Q: _____. IN SOME WAYS YOU WERE ALMOST AN EQUAL, EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE A CHILD.

A: Yes. Most of the time, starting in the ghetto when I got a little bit older, I remember my mother would say everything to me. She would express all her thoughts and all her fears and all her pain and everything, she would just say it out loud. I don't know if it was to me or she would just say it, and sometimes I would respond. I remember later, in Germany, she told me everything. How she felt. What she was afraid of. She would share all her thoughts with me and everything that she knew. She would tell me about all the conversation that she had with the Germans, with a neighbor or with a landlady. She told me everything and I always listened. I liked to listen to her. I would never bring it up, never talk about it, but I would absorb everything and remember everything. I have a good memory. I do have an excellent memory, even now. Sometimes I'm amazed about the details that

I remember, and sights, and weather. I remember weather also. Especially in Germany, wintertime, how beautiful it was and with the snow and river frozen in some places.

Q: AND THAT SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD PLACE TO START NEXT TIME -- YOUR LIFE IN GERMANY.

BERLIN WALL BEFORE AND AFTER Part III

NELLI CESANA

Jewish Holocaust survivor from the Warsaw Ghetto. Born 1935 in Warsaw, Poland. Former nurse and currently medical office clerk. Lives in Northern California, USA.

Living in terror, frightening and scared: that was my childhood.

Q: We hardly know anything about Warsaw before the war. Can you tell me what kind of city Warsaw was if you remember?

A: Warsaw was recorded as a settlement from the 13th century, and became the capital of Poland in 1596. I was too small to remember prewar Warsaw, so my memory is vague. But my mother used to take me around the city and talked a lot about the city's history. Warsaw was a relatively small city but very modern, a cosmopolitan and culturally well advanced capital city in eastern Europe. There were great museums, opera houses, music halls, ballets, theaters, movies, open air classical concerts for weekends, and so on. The city was surrounded by beautiful parks and romantic rivers and used to be called a 'Little Paris'.

In 1939, when Poland was invaded by Germany, we had a weak government economically and politically, and Ignacy Moscicki, the state leader, was afterwards blamed for the invasion. The population of Warsaw was 1,300,000 and a half million of them were Jewish inhabitants, more than a third of them were Jewish, and that made it the biggest Jewish community in entire Europe. The majority of them lived in one particular quarter of the city. Many Jews were well educated and from intellectual professions: doctors, lawyers, university professors, corporation and business investors, and so on. My family: my grandparents, my parents, my brother and me, were like many others, all born and raised in Poland for many generations and an average working class Warsaw family, and we had a relatively peaceful life. Despite all that, however, historically there were deep anti-Semitism roots among the Polish people for centuries. Traditionally, Poland was, and still is, an orthodox Catholic state and the prejudice was based on its religion and ignorance.

Q: Within weeks Poland had fallen to Germany after its invasion, and by the end of September 1939, Warsaw was fully surrendered to the German Army. Destruction of Polish Jewry commenced immediately. Perhaps you were too young to remember what was happening...?

A: In the summer of 1939, everybody was talking about what was going on in Germany; we knew it was soon going to be war. My father, a business merchant and Zionist, always talked about it and wanted to emigrate to Palestine, but we couldn't.

It was early in September: I was only four years old then, but I remember it because at the fear of bombing. There were huge factories near our apartment building and the Germans attacked with an air raid in the night, and a piece of shrapnel fell down near my bed in our fourth floor apartment and we all panicked. I looked down the streets and saw burning, smoke, fire, and people screaming in panic and running away. Right away we knew that the Germans were in Warsaw. Then the pogrom began overnight. 500,000 Warsaw Jews became a fatal catastrophe.

Within days there were loudspeakers announcing that every Jew must take in their luxury items, such as diamonds, gold chains, fur coats, watches, rings, silver plate etc., to the Warsaw SS Headquarters. All Jewish children were stopped from attending school. Jews couldn't enter public libraries which had been built by Jewish philanthropists. Every Jew had to wear a Star of David armband in public, even babies, and if they didn't, they would be punished either by being beaten or killed. People were fined for wearing a dirty or wrinkled armband. Jews were not allowed to travel in streetcars or trains, and so on. Jews were deprived of all human rights. When German soldiers walked in the streets, Jews had to step aside to let them pass ahead like dogs, otherwise they abused or killed us. One day I saw German soldiers grabbing an elderly orthodox Jewish man in the streets and started abusing, kicking and pulling him around in his traditional plaited beard as he screamed in pain. The pogroms were performed not only by German soldiers but also encouraged anti-Jewish Polish people to join in and took their own turn against Jews. In many streets I saw furniture being violently dragged out of Jewish premises by Poles, and many Jews were attacked and robbed by hoodlums without interference by bystanders. The pogroms got particularly intense in time before or during every Jewish holiday.

Q: When the Warsaw Ghetto was built and Jews were to relocate? Can you tell me about life inside the ghetto?

A: After one year of living in fear and riots in the city, in November 1940 construction of the ghetto wall was completed and all Jews were moved into the ghetto. No one was allowed to carry furniture or anything else except a handful personal belongings. The Warsaw Ghetto was sealed off and totally segregated from Poles and life only for Jews began inside the ghetto. My family and relatives, grandparents, three aunts and cousins, were all inside the ghetto. Then the blockade started and we learned any Jew who tried to escape would be shot. No Jews were permitted to leave the ghetto. They were cut off from work. In the beginning everybody kept quiet and calm, and started opening up shops and schools or communities, plays and movie theaters, businesses, workshops, coffee shops or night clubs and so on, and tried to bring their life back to normal again. My brother, then 14, hated it and refused to living there saying, "It is like being animals". But there was no way to escape. He sold his bar mitzvah suit, which was expensive at that time, and bought a false Christian Polish identification card through the black market, and he managed to escape from the ghetto. He had connections with the Polish youth resistance organization against Nazi Germany, we learned later. After he left, me, my parents and relatives all lived nearby. The living conditions in the ghetto got worse day by day. First of all, the food supply was cut off and there was not enough to eat.Polish children came to the ghetto through sewage and smuggled foods in exchange for valuables from Jews. But the ghetto soon ran out of money and goods, and gradually the economic system collapsed. My brother used to visit us through the sewage and brought out smuggled food for us like bread, eggs or milk, and it kept us alive for some time. Chronic food shortages got worse everyday and people started dying of starvation or typhus in the streets, and as time passed, in the early 1944, the death toll had rapidly reached to few thousands. Meanwhile, deportation had started. The German soldiers unpredictably came to the ghetto with trucks to grab any Jews from their homes or from the streets and deported them to Treblinka,the extermination camp northeast of Warsaw. One day they suddenly showed up in the home of my grandparents, the aunts and cousins, they and their wives and husbands were all taken away. We never saw them again. Then my parents and I went into hiding, moving from one place to another and sleeping in different locations every night, and we managed to escape from the Nazis' hands. Then we lost contact with my brother.

Q: How did you and your patents adopt to life in the ghetto and to survive?

A: Our survival story in the ghetto was beyond miracle and beyond luck. It was one close call to another of life and death, moment by moment from beginning to the end. To stay alive in such conditions, you must be smart, shrewd and wise.

My mother, 40 years old then, was nothing special, but a smart woman who had keen instincts to sense what was going on in each event. She was well informed. For instance, in case she was caught by Nazis, she had prepared herself to avoid being taken to Treblinka. Once she discussed about it with her friend and learned a new idea. She knew German soldiers took them to the station first and let them line up and loaded them into cattle trains. Her friend suggested to her that if it happened to her; while thousands of people keep moving to get into the trains in loading process, don't follow them. Instead, walk 'backwards' step by step and let others go forward until the train fills, so that she may have a chance of not being taken. Which was what happened. Once my mother and I were caught in the streets and taken to the station. German guards were chasing dogs and shooting brutally. I got scared and started crying. But my mother was calm; holding my hand very tight, she walked slowly backward while others were ahead of us - the way she calculated, and gradually the train filled up. Then another train arrived, but she repeated the same trick again,and there were no more trains after that.We and few others were left in the station and eventualluy German soldiers released us. That astonished my father who was in despair, thinking we were taken.

One time in the summer of 1942, my father got a carpenter's job for a housing project, and found a little hiding spot in the ceiling of the building where nobody can see it. So we went up there in hiding. There were already 30 people hiding there including one baby. Anyway we joined them. Minutes later thousands of German soldiers appeared with hundreds of trucks and dogs in the streets, entering every building, randomly knocking and breaking down each apartment door with rifles and banging on walls to hunt out Jews. We were all terrified. But we kept hiding there, squeezing each other for hours. Then suddenly the baby started crying. We got panicked. We were all scared and afraid of being heard by the German soldiers who were below us. But we didn't know how to stop the crying baby, whose Jewish policeman father and its mother were both absent. It was held by their friend. Then someone had a piece of cucumber. We gave to the baby to sack it.

We were a group of thirty people and luckily 'one piece of cucumber' saved all of our lives. Then a fatal thing happened to may father who was hiding in the same building, but in a different room. Abruptly, his name was called out in Polish by someone outside asking him to come out. The German soldiers knew there were twenty Jewish carpenters in the building and they had captured nineteen of them, but one man was missing, and that was my father. Shouting voices threatened him that if he refused to come out, his nineteen colleagues would be all shot instantly in the street. He gave up hiding and surrendered to the Germans. We never saw him again.

Q: After losing two men from the family, son and husband, life must have been dreadful for your mother...

A: After that, survival in the ghetto was extremely hard. Because the ghetto became smaller and smaller and it was difficult to hide, and no food was around. At seven, I was very tiny and skinny, and always hungry. Nevertheless, we were always fugitives together; my mother never left me alone anywhere all those years.

Another time, we were captured and taken to the railway station again, but this time her method didn't work like before, because there was 'selection' at the station. A German officer was standing there and dividing people in two directions, and I and my mother were separated. She got a sudden scared but she kept her head. She swiftly grabbed me among the chaotic crowds of people and hid me underneath her long raincoat to run in her direction. No Germans were watching but a Jewish policeman. She was stopped by him. She got panicked as hell and started a fistfight with him holding me underneath her raincoat, and shouted at him, "Please leave me alone, I won't go without my daughter!" At that moment she could have been easily shot on the spot. She was ready to die for me. She was a determined mother. No matter whatever came next, it was 'not without me'. In the end, the Jewish policeman stopped fighting with her and left her alone. There was big disturbed crowds around and nobody cared what was going on. Overall, the luckiest thing was that no SS guard was watching. After that incident, we did the same trick again in the station, walking backwards while many others were loaded onto the trains until we were left behind. Again we made it.

In the same station, by the way, I saw Dr. Janusz Korczak, a well known orphanage philosopher with his children taking away to Triblinka. I saw him because my mother pointed to me.

Q: What a courageous woman you mother was, and what an extraordinary experience you had! Then as the ghetto was evacuated, and people mostly either died or were sent to Treblinka, what happened to both of you?

A: When we came back to the ghetto, the streets were totally deserted like a ghost city except for a few German guards patrolling on motorcycles. Most apartments were vandalized, households scattered all over, smashed windows, broken doors and it was hardly livable. But, the Jewish hunt never ended, so we still kept moving and sleeping in different places every night. In the winter of 1942 it was freezing cold; we had to burn furniture from the streets to keep warm in many of the places we slept. I had lice in my hair because of no washing for months, which was awful. Somehow, few Jews were still left and hiding, and my mother found a job; potato peeling in the soup kitchen of a small factory for 12 hours a day, which was the luckiest opportunity for us because we got food. Hunger was our fatal disease and potatos were like gold and really saved our life.

In early spring of 1943, life in the ghetto became desperate. There was hardly any food around. And, more bodies covered by newspapers were left in the streets, and more German soldiers were everywhere. Loudspeakers were announced every day that Germans were providing work and better living conditions for us in the countryside, and that they would transfer us there, and to get ready. My mother was exhausted and desperate by then, believed what they said and decided to follow. Then a young Polish girl, a black market trafficker, came and asked my mother for trade. My mother suddenly recalled her son, my 16 year old brother who lived outside the ghetto under an assumed name and had lost contact for years. She asked the girl to deliver her letter to him in exchange for a free tablecloth and the girl agreed. That was the last hope for my mother. Next day my brother came to see us. Since he knew everything about the ghetto conditions, he was astonished to see us alive. He thought we had perished in Treblinka. It was a very tearful and deeply emotional family reunion. He arranged to get us out of the ghetto. Within days he returned with a false Polish I.D. for my mother. His escape plan was to separate the two of us over two nights. I was the first to go through sewage pipes and climb up the ghetto walls at a specific time and location, as he waited the other side of the wall. When I reached the top of the wall and was about to jump off to the other side, sudden gunfire started inside the ghetto. My mother was horrified and got panicked, and disappeared in the dark. I was lost. 'Jump, jump, hurry up, Nelli!" said my brother, so I did.

Q: Your fugitive life has the great suspense like a dramatic novel. So, that was the first time you were separated from your mother. Then, what had happened?

A: The first thing my brother firmly forced me to understand was that we were good friends but 'not family.' He was under the I.D. of 'disguised Polish', not Jew. He even taught me if someone sticked knife in my neck, don't tell the truth. He was a tall, handsome man who looked older than his age, and didn't look Jewish at all. He took me to his Polish family home where he lived and introduced me to his landlady, who never suspected him Jew.

The next night was my mother's turn. I anxiously awaited for her because of all those dreadful years we lived together, and escaped danger but always survived, and it was the first time had been without her.She was supposed to escape through the wall of barbed wire at the back of the ghetto. In the early dawn my brother arrived home with my mother. I was so happy to see her safe. After she vanished, her story of how she got out was another suspense novel. Anyway we three were back together again. The landlady was a widow with two young daughters - one of whom my brother was dating, was taking a fatal risk for us, because anyone who hid Jews in their home would be shot to death including all tenants in the building. And, any Jew living outside the ghetto would be killed by Polish mobs. My brother was convinced it'd be too dangerous for us to stay in Warsaw or Poland, and only and the last chance for survival was escape to Germany. That shocked my mother, of course. It sounded to her like a mad suicide. But his idea was that there were labor shortages in Germany and non-Jewish workers were badly needed from anywhere. Besides, Germans can't distinguish Jews from Aryans, so it was easier to stay there.

Her first step was to make a job application. She personally had to go to the Gestapo office in Warsaw with her faked I.D. It terrified her absolutely. She didn't have the guts for that. She kept refusing:"I can't do it, it's just impossible for me". It took him two days to convince her. With his support and encouragement, she made it after three attempts, and she got a job in Berlin. As a child, I was innocently excited by the idea of the train trip to Germany.

My mother spoke Polish, German and Russian, besides Yiddish, and in fact, this played a key role in the last part of our survival.New life outside the ghetto began with an uncertain future ahead. Our new journey as fugitive had began as a Polish Christian mother and her daughter, 'not as Jews'.

Q: Jews inside the ghetto were killed by Germans and Jews outside the ghetto would be killed by Poles. Either way, the destiny for Jews was death. But going to Nazi Germany sounds unquestionably risky. How did things go with your new life in Germany?

A: The Job assigned to my mother was to move stones and clean up an airfield north of Berlin. It was heavy outdoor physical labor, and for a woman like her raised as a city girl, it was too tough to keep up. Then new and different job turned up. A wealthy German retired couple was seeking someone to work on their farm in the Berlin countryside, and her German language skills and high knowledge of German culture impressed the couple and she was hired by them. The farm was one hour's drive from Berlin, in the acres of land surrounded by beautiful trees by the river, ponds, animals, vegetable fields, flowers etc., and best of all, there was plenty of food to eat. For us, it was heaven after the bloody war outside and I was very happy there. Only one man, a young Polish man was taking care of the entire farm. My mother was assigned to work in the vegetable field. The couple, Mr.& Mrs. Muller, retired government officials whose sons were in the German air force fighting somewhere, were not doing much every day. From time to time, boats arrived from Berlin carrying goodies such as drinks, paintings, almonds and many other which were onfiscated from Occupied German territories; we reloaded them and store them in two huge warehouses at the farm.

A cute little farmhouse was provided for us and we liked it a lot. During the day while my mother was working at the farm, I used to go swimming in the river or play with neighboring German children; I learned German very fast. That was, in fact, the first time for me of being a child and mingling with other children of my own age. In the evening, we talked optimistically about our many dreams how we would like to be if we survived through the war. However, we had some problems with the Polish man in the farm. He suspected us of being Jews. Not to my mother who was tall with blonde hair and elegantly dressed, but me. I looked very much like my father's side and didn't look like my mother. So he thought I was a bastard born from a Jewish man who she'd had an affair with. Every time he got drunk, he came to accuse us, and we were very scared of him. And, one day the Gestapo showed up at our farm and arrested him, but not us. We learned later that he was stealing farm goods and trading with Polish people in Berlin. Thank God, he was gone! We were saved, yet again...

There was more work for my mother after that nosy Polish man had gone but we felt fine and comfortable. Then, my mother was acquainted with Mrs. Muller. She often came to talk to my mother in her working site. They discussed German history, literature, or art so that impressed and pleased Mrs. Muller more. The Mullers also talked about the war situation. They told us that if Germany was defeated by the Allies, they would all commit suicide. Anyway, one day, she showed my mother a piece of soap. She explained to her that was manufactured in the extermination camp in Auschwitz death camp called 'Judenseife'(Jewish Soap)made from Jewish corpes and distributed all over Germany. Imagine, how my mother felt about it. She almost fainted.

Meanwhile bad news came to us. My brother in Warsaw was killed. We had been happily corresponding with since we settled at the farm. He was in the underground resistance member fighting for Free Poland against Nazi Germany and was shot by Nazis in October 1943, six months after the Warsaw Ghetto revolt. According to his close friend, he died a hero for his country, Poland. That shocked my mother so deeply that she was never been the same person ever again. She lost her wish to live and totally despaired, and almost committed suicide.

In the spring of 1945, the Allies were bombing more and more, and the sky of Berlin was like a christmas tree every night that we saw it from our village. Leaflets were scattered from the sky writing in Polish and Russian, 'War will be over soon, we will come to liberate you!' So we knew the war was ending finally and the Russians were coming to Germany. Shortly after that, Russian soldiers came to our village and sought a Russian-German interpreter,so my mother volunteered. They were pleased to find her, but my mother was still concealed the fact being Jewish: She didn't trust anybody, neither Russians nor Germans in such an unsteady situation. They gave us a lot of looted clothes and shoes which were all useful for us, because we'd never had enough of them. They were really wild and coarse, like peasants. They got drunk with looted alcohols and raped many young German women in the village. But they didn't touch my mother. They respected her because of her high education and skills, a 'Polish woman' who speaks Russian and German, and they badly needed her. However, she was cautious with them all the time throughout the ordeal.

Q: After the war ended, where did you go and how did you and your mother organize a new life? What made you come to the United States?

A: At the end of the war we decided to return to Warsaw, hoping we might find someone alive there. Poland was totally ruined by the bombardment and so devastated that we couldn't recognize it. We found no Jews alive, not our family or any relatives, nobody. My mother realized that we were the only Jewish survivors around and started crying in despair and fear. Then we visited my brother's cemetery, whose grave was covered by a poem written by his closest friend, "You fought for your fatherland but died quietly. You remain in my heart forever!" That was another emotional wound for us. We ended up in the refugee camp for displaced Jewish People outside Warsaw, and there my mother met a man she knew before who had lost his two children in the Holocaust, but survived himself. Most Holocaust survivors were young, and not many were in their 40's. By then, she had lost her energy to live on her own and married him. In 1950, the three of us moved to Israel and started a new life.

I was then 9 and half years old and had never been to school or had any decent childhood. Living in the terror and fear that scarred my childhood during my years as fugitive, meant I had to catch up on my education very fast in Israel. Despite an unsteady and hard life in Israel, I felt happy, and it's my home because for the first time in my life I was together with other children of my age at school and I learned to be strong, independent and free. At 17, I became a nurse and started working in a hospital. There I met and fell in love with a man who was an Italian Jew lived in the United States, who later became my husband. After me, my mother emigrated to America with her second husband and we all lived happily in California. She loved America very much and used to say, "I wish I had been born in America". She died naturally in 1986 at the age of 85. As I already said many times, my mother was a very special person. Without her I wouldn't be here. I would had been killed in the Holocaust like same way as other millions of Jews. ***