

[INAUDIBLE], 10 seconds, [INAUDIBLE].

OK, today is February the 28th, 1991. And I'm here at the Oral History Project of San Francisco to interview Nelly Cesana. I'm Sandra Bendayan. And let's begin, Nelly. Could you introduce yourself with your maiden name and where and when you were born?

My name is Nelly Zeigler. I was born September 29, 1935 in Warsaw. I also know the address where my parents used to live. It is Pawia Street, number 54, fourth floor, apartment number 73. And I had an older brother, who was nine years older than me. His name was Marian and we called him Mietek. My father's name was Josef, and my mother, Paula.

The first-- the earliest memory that I have is as a young child going for a walk with my father, when he used to take me for a walk. And walking with him in the streets in Warsaw, and my father-- looked like a giant to me, next to me. He was a big man, tall man. And he held my hand. And his hand was large. And it was-- I felt very good and very happy.

And we would stop by in a little grocery store and my father would buy me a heart-shaped honey cookie. And I'll never remember the taste of that cookie. It-- 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 parents' bed. And I remember, to entertain me my mother would give me a very large pocket book, a red, shining pocket book, which was filled with pictures, family pictures. And this was one of my favorite activities, to look through the pictures. And that's how I spent the time when I had to stay in bed.

I would also get into my brother's collection of cowboy books of like comic books. And I would love to look at pictures. And I guess I would tear some out, and when he came home, he was really upset with me. Yes, but he was a sweet brother to me. And I also remember when he used to play with me. And 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 only memories I really have.

And the next thing that I remember is the first sounds of the war. And this must have been in 1939, when the Germans were bombing Warsaw. We were all-- my mother, my father, and I, we were all in bed. And something came through the ceiling. Shrapnel fell into the room. And there was panic. And 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.

You were already having difficulty getting food at that period?

I'm sure. I can't remember, but I'm sure it was. Yeah, it was difficult. Times were hard. The next thing I remember is when we were in ghetto. Now this must be in 1941 now, because that's what I know, when they opened-- when they built a wall around the ghetto and gathered all the Jews.

No, excuse me, there was something else I remember, before that. When we were still living all together in our apartment, we heard a commotion, and shooting, and screaming in the street. And we all ran to the balcony to look down. And there were German officers. And there was a Jew in the street, right below our balcony.

And a religious Jew, he had a long beard. And they stood and they were cutting his beard off. And I remember my mother started crying, because she says-- she said that they were ripping his beard out, not really cutting, but they were ripping his flesh out.

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

Did you have other family around, any grandparents, or aunts and uncles?

Yes, my whole family was living in Warsaw. I had a grandfather. And my mother had a few sisters, Genja, Roza, Mila, Halina, four sisters, and a brother, Heniek. My Aunt Kenya was very wealthy. They were millionaires and owners of factory in Poland, nails, and screws, and hardware factory. And they had two sons.

And my mother's brother was married and he had one daughter, named Nina. She was about maybe eight years old. And 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-- 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. And he was really raised by his older sister, Bella, who had two sons and a daughter. I don't remember the boy's name, but the daughter is named Helena. And she survived and she lives in Los Angeles. She's 15 years older than me.

And what about grandparents?

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, [? Frania. ?] And this is my only aunt that has survived the war. And she eventually immigrated to Israel and I was with her there. My Aunt [? Frania ?] had two children also, Yurik and Rutka, 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. And the next-- the next thing that I remember is being actually in a ghetto. I don't know where we were living. We were living 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.

And I know that my brother was not around. And from what my mother was telling me later, I know that he rebelled very much and he did not want to stay in a ghetto. And he used 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.

And 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. And 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.

Was he in the underground or was he passing?

Well, we didn't know anything. Later on, years later, we found out that he was in the underground. He joined the Polish underground. He had an identity card with the name of Marian Piotrowski. And his age was showing as 19 years old. But he was-- he was actually at that time, I think, 15.

And 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 and he would bring some food to us. And he would bring a loaf of white bread for my grandfather, because he couldn't eat regular-- the ghetto bread, which was heavy, like cement.

And then our daily life was a preoccupation, day and night, with hiding. The survival was to find some food and to hide from the Germans. Because they had all the time blockades. We Polish, we called it blokada. 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.

And they would catch people, anybody, wherever they could find them. They would drag them out of houses. They would beat in-- break in the doors. And just catch anyone, a child, or old person, or whoever it was, in the street, in a store, just everywhere. So 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.

So you had no set home for yourself?

No, we were-- we were moving around. For a while, I think we were together with my father in some room some place and there were some other people nearby. And I remember my father came home one day and he told my mother that a friend of his confided in him that he knew 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 desks, carpentry work to make desks, and he needed 10 people to do this job. And he suggested to my father if he would join them, pretend to be a carpenter, and that would make it safe for him to survive that time. And he said to my mother that she could dress up like a cleaning lady and sweep the shop and they wouldn't take her probably.

And I-- then there was a plan for a whole group of people to hide in that workshop. There was opening in the ceiling, I guess an attic, but it was invisible. You couldn't really see it. And there would be a whole group of people hiding there. So he said my mother would be a cleaning lady and I would hide with the rest of the people up there.

And my mother was very scared. She says, I cannot do that. I have to be together with Nelly. And 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 and there was a big group of people.

There were no children, except myself. And somebody had a little tiny baby. And they said that this baby was the child of one of the Jewish policemen, who was working in the streets. They were patrolling downstairs. And there was a little window, a tiny little window out to the street.

Well, we were all huddled together there and we sat very quietly. And very shortly afterwards, we hear the trucks, and the soldiers, and the barking of the dogs. And the rifle-- rifle-- the butts of the rifle, they would knock on the walls and on the floors and screaming.

And suddenly, the baby started crying. And it was just panic up there. And they couldn't shut the baby up. And people started talking that there are 30 of us, we are young people, and there was one little baby. They were making plans to shut the baby up permanently. And suddenly, somebody pulled out-- there was a woman, she had a cucumber with her. And she took that out and she said 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 stayed quiet.

We were all sitting trembling there, because it was very scary, with the dogs barking. And we knew that if they find us there, we would be shot on the spot. So, it was terrible fear. Suddenly, we hear more commotion and more noise. And we hear somebody calling my father's last name, calling Zeigler-- Zeigler, come out, nothing will happen to you, in Polish. Come out, I promise nothing will happen to you.

And my mother started crying. And she said, oh, my god, what happened-- 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 know if-- we didn't hear his name being called anymore. And we peaked out the window and we saw hundreds of people lined up in the streets and the soldiers surrounding them all with rifles, and just screaming, and crying, and commotion, and panic.

And then it all quieted down. They all went away. And we stayed there for a long time, still afraid to come down. Until we hear the voice of the Jewish policeman knock up in the ceiling. He said, it's safe, you can all come out now. So my mother ran to him, crying, tell me what happened to my husband, what happened to him?

And he said that in the last minute the soldiers rounded up all the people that worked in that carpentry shop and my father, in the last moment, ran away to hide. Some place in a courtyard there was a pile of hay and that was the only place that he climbed and covered himself. But he heard the supervisor of the carpenters calling his name, because he said that he had the list of 10 workers. And the Germans said, if you don't get me the 10th man, I will shoot you on the spot.

And apparently, he said my father came out, because they were checking with bayonets in the hay. And so he said, according to him, my father came out and he joined the rest of the people in the street. And we never heard from him again. I never saw my father again.

This was 1942. And it must have been in summertime, because it was warm weather. I think maybe it was June. Yeah.

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

Do you remember how she managed to find hiding places?

No. I know just we would go from one-- there were a lot of buildings that were already abandoned because people were taken away. So there were all kinds of empty places. It just looked like after maybe an atomic bomb, destruction, and empty places, and broken furniture, and things thrown all over. And people would just take up a little place. Some were 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.

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

Do you know how she came by getting food?

We were pretty much starving, yeah. And my mother, I don't know-- I don't know where she-- she had a few things. And I know we would carry some things with us, a suitcase and belongings, I don't know. And my mother would sell things whenever she could and buy a loaf of bread for that.

And I know that when we were living in that kitchen, it was cold and freezing. And we had no fuel to heat in the wood oven. And so nearby there was, I guess, a bakery. And they would deliver wood. And so she sent me-- at night I would 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.

Now I remember a time when we were living in some apartment. I was with my mother. It was high, maybe third, fourth floor. And this must have been at the beginning in the ghetto. And my mother had a neighbor who she befriended next door. And they would get together and talk. And that lady told my mother that if you are 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 and they would-- 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 whole group.

And my mother asked her why. And she explained that once you arrive to the Umschlagplatz-- so this lady explained to my mother that 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. And so 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. And we were lined up, first of all, in the courtyard, and then with all the hundreds of other people in the streets and surrounded by soldiers and with their rifles and shooting position. And they would make everybody run. And people would fall over each other.

And my mother held my hand very tight. And everybody was running. And she was walking back a little. But then I was-- I was just terrified. I cried and I said, they will shoot us, I'm afraid they will shoot us. And she was very tough with me. And she said, shut up, you have to do what I'm telling you to do, we will survive that way. And I was just always very terrified, but my mother forced me.

And we were among the last people. And so I remember when we got to the Umschlagplatz, and I remember like a huge terminal, a railway station, lined-- I remember white tiles. And there was children abandoned in baby carriages, sick people sitting just on the floor.

And we were waiting in line. And the trains came and they filled up with people. And then other train came and filled up again. And there was a small group of us that was left. And we waited until-- in the Umschlagplatz, we stayed there until it was dark. This started in the morning, early. And finally, when we-- toward the end, it was just very dark already and there was a small group of us left.

And I don't remember any soldiers or anybody. I just know that we all scattered and we run. And nobody else was with us, just my mother and I. And we walked through the streets of Warsaw. It was dark. And it was very quiet. And there was nobody around. Open windows and beddings hanging out through the windows.

And 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. And every time if we heard some vehicle coming, we would run into a building. And 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 at day time, we were walking in the streets and my father was running toward us. And he wore a light colored shirt and a pair of pants. He had no jacket. And 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 that we had.

And also prior-- before they took my father away, I remember also when he was sick in the ghetto. He had typhus. And he was very, very sick. He was hallucinating. And he wanted to walk out from the balcony on the fourth floor. And my mother would fight with him to restrain him, to keep him. And I know he was saying, well, I have to go, I have this appointment, I have this business to attend. And she would physically force him to stay in bed.

And she took care of him. And somehow he recuperated from typhus. And then I was sick with typhus. I don't remember how I recuperated.

Any medication?

Oh, no, no doctors, no medicines, no-- no. I don't remember anything like that. And then, of course, he was very weak after the typhus. And we didn't have enough food. So 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 still remember walking upstairs and my mother asked her to feed my-- something. My father he was so weak and he needed a little food.

So were you in the ghetto at that time?

That was-- yes, that was all in the ghetto, yeah.

But your aunt was outside the ghetto or inside?

Oh, no, everybody was in the-- everyone was in the ghetto. The only one that was outside was my brother. And I don't remember him coming over. This was very seldom. Just at the beginning it 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.

What year was the Umschlagplatz?

At the Umschlagplatz when I was with my mother, it was-- I don't know if it was 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.

And at one time, my grandfather came to live with us. And at that time, my mother was working in the kitchen-- soup kitchen. And that was-- the soup kitchen was set up in a workshop for tailors. There were tailors working there and sewing, I don't know, uniforms or something for the Germans. Well, my mother would sit there all day long or into the night, sitting and peeling potatoes. And most of the time I would stay home alone.

She was working at night also, a lot at night. And I remember I stayed home a lot by myself. And I remember my grandfather came to stay with us. He had a very hard time. He was starving. And so once in a while my brother would-- when he came over, he brought a loaf of white bread for my father-- for my grandfather, because that was the only thing he could have.

I remember my grandfather getting up in the morning and putting his tallis on. He had the tefillin. And he would wrap it around his hand and stood by the window, and he would pray, and he would pray, he would pray. My grandfather was a religious Jew. He was not-- my grandparents were not Orthodox. He had a tiny, little beard.

Was your family practicing? No.

Not my parents. My mother came from a religious family, as I say, my father-- I mean my grandfather and my grandma on my parents side, they kept kosher, and they were following the tradition. And my grandfather always wore a hat or kippah. And 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-- it was while my grandfather was living with us and 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. And so we were playing on the staircase in the building.

And I remember we were pretending that we have a birthday party. We have a party, some kind of a party. And 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. And 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.

And somehow I made my way into the place where this little boy was living, in the apartment. And there was a wardrobe cabinet. And I opened the door and I looked inside. And it was full with food, stuffed with food. Not food ready to eat, but there were like dry foods-- dry food-- beans, flour. And there was a bottle of honey.

And I took that bottle of honey, and I ran home, and I gave it to my mother. And my grandfather was around. And 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.

And whenever my mother came home after her shift, night shift, working all night, she would bring that little container, like that, with soup. And when she came into the door, I grabbed it-- let me taste. I would say, just let me taste it. And she would let me taste it and took a few swallows and bites and it was gone. It was all gone. I ate the whole thing because I was so hungry. And my poor mother would cry, because there was nothing left for her.

Anyway, I showed up at home with that bottle of honey and it meant life, survival. And my grandfather told my mother, take that honey and hide it outside the apartment because they will look for it and she will blabber out. We can't trust children. And she listened to his advice, and she took that bottle, and she left the apartment. And I don't know where she went, someplace. And she hid the bottle of honey.

Well, the next day or so, police came to our apartment, Jewish police, but they were in civilian clothes. And they said that I guess this boy's mother was smuggling and doing food. And that was her business. She was going to the outside of the ghetto and buying and selling things.

And he said that your daughter stole something from this place, a bottle of honey, and they wanted to question me. And I remember they picked me up and they sat me down on the table. And my mother stood next to me. And they started interrogating me-- did you take that bottle? I said, yes.

And my mother said, she doesn't know what she's saying, I never saw any bottle. And then they sent her out of the room. And they questioned me and they scared me. I was terrified. And they threatened. And they said, you better tell us, did you take? And I said, yes. And where is it?

I said, well, let me look, it must be here. And I think maybe it's there. And they looked there. They didn't find it. And I said, well, maybe over there. And they went all over the whole-- through the whole apartment and they couldn't find it. And 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.

Well, eventually they left. And I guess they tried to keep law and order in the ghetto. Yeah. But I know--

Seems like the cabinet where the food was rather obvious.

It was all locked up. And 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. And I gave it to my mother. Because we were all hungry and we all looked for something to put in our mouth.

Well, my grandfather didn't stay very long with us. He was not very happy there because I would eat his bread, his white bread. He would hide it and I would find it. And I would always break off. And in no time, it was all gone and then he would be hungry. And he told my mother that he has to go and he will go live with his other daughter, my Aunt Roza.

What had happened to his wife?

Oh, she died a natural death, I think before the war. But his second wife, I don't know. I don't know what happened to her. But I know that he was on his own at that time.

Well, I remember when my mother continued working in that soup kitchen and she was working now days-- daytime, and I was going with her. And there was a whole group of women sitting there and peeling potatoes. And I guess children were not allowed there and there were no other children. And every time a German would come and inspect and everything, they would hide me someplace, someplace under a table. I would run out in the street and hide in some doorways. And when they went away, I would come back and sit under the table.

And when there was a chance, my mother would take potatoes and stuff it in my clothing. And 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. And 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 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. And eventually, we accumulated a very nice amount of the potatoes. And my mother would come home and she would cook soups. And we were eating and we felt stronger. And it was-- mother knew.

How did she come by that job? It sounds like it was a good job.

I'm not sure, but I think maybe because my mother's older sister, Genja, 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 and they have these workshops. And they have tailors. So why don't you pretend that you know how to sew on a machine. And my mother said, I never touched a sewing machine, I don't know how, I can't. And so she says, well, I got the job there and this way I can survive maybe.

And so maybe it was her suggestion, go find something, maybe in the kitchen, that's possible. I don't remember seeing

my grandmother there-- I mean, my aunt. But I remember her talking about it, that you have to get busy and work so this way you can survive. If you're just by yourself in the apartment or in the street, they will catch you and they will ship you out.

Did your mother work before the war?

No, she never worked. She never did any work, except being housewife and mother. So, well, I don't know how the job ended, but everything ended and we always moved again. And there we were all by ourselves.

Now before that, after some time, my grandfather-- no, my aunt, my mother's sister, Roza, came to visit us. And she said to tell my mother that my grandfather and I, she said, we are going to go voluntarily to the Umschlagplatz, because they are going to give us a loaf of bread and some jelly. And they are going to relocate us and we are going to work in those places. She says, we can't make it anymore, we are starving. So she said this was the plan for my Aunt Roza and my grandfather just to go. And they said goodbye to each other and they went. And never saw them again.

It seems like you must have been a very disciplined child to be quiet through all those episodes where you had to be totally quiet.

Oh, yes.

And you followed every order your mother said to the T.

Oh, yes. I was a child, but I behaved like an adult when I had to, yes. No, I-- no, we had to. The fear-- the fear made me listen to whatever my-- my mother said. Excuse me. Can we stop?

[INAUDIBLE].

OK.

Take it up to speed. OK, any time.

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. And we were going to meet my brother, who was coming from the other side. And we met him some place in the street and he gave us some eggs, broken. And my mother had a cup in her hand. And there were a couple eggs that were cracked in that cup. And we were walking back home. My brother left and we were walking back home in the street and my mother held that cup in her hand.

And suddenly, she was attacked by an old man, who was half naked. Like, he looked crazy. He looked insane, with a beard, and starved eyes. And he stuck his hand in the cup, and pulled everything out, and straight in his mouth like that, and he ran away.

What was your brother doing? How could he be outside?

Well, I was talking about it before. My brother was nine years older than me. And he managed to get false identity papers. And 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 the ghetto. And he said, I'm going to be free, I'm going out.

And so at that time, he joined the Polish underground. But we didn't know anything about it. And so occasionally, he would come into the ghetto. He would buy things from the Jewish people. And there was this black market going on all the time. The Poles would come and they would buy from the Jews. Either they would bring a loaf of bread, or some money, or something. And so my that's how my brother was surviving also.



I think that he specialized in something. What he was doing, I remember my mother said, he was buying sewing machines, the heads only of sewing machines. And he would smuggle that out from the ghetto. And he would buy it for food and money, and he would take it to the Polish side and sell it. And that's how he survived. And he was-- that's how he made a living.

Now, we had no information. He never confided in anyone, not to my mother or to my father earlier, that he was in the underground, but that he was 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. [? Elevine. ?]

I don't remember the street address, but 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 a next street over, on the other side.

Anyway, you get this crazed man coming.

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. But normal sight in the ghetto, I remember, if you walked the street, you saw children begging-- beggars everywhere, starved, on the verge of death. And there were a lot of corpses, mainly children and babies, swollen and covered with a newspaper and a rock on top. And that was a normal sight. And we would walk by.

At one time, my mother, I don't know why, but she needed to place me somewhere, in a safe place. And she went with me to-- it was apparently a kindergarten. And we stood in line to go in there. There were other children inside. And 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. And she says, how come-- what are you doing in this line? And my mother said that she wanted to place me there for a while. And she said, well, you shouldn't do that. 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?

And my mother said, you know, you're right, I shouldn't. And so we walked away. And a while later, we found out that whole school, that whole little kindergarten was taken away, all of the children that were placed there. Then, at one time, she placed me also on some-- I don't know if I spent a day or an hour, I don't know, among children. It was some kind of a school, or babysitting, or whatever.

And when my mother picked me up, they shaved my head completely, because I was infested with lice. And I remember my mother crying because I had beautiful long hair. And they put a scarf and a [INAUDIBLE] scarf. And I remember my mother saying, oh, my god, look at this, the lice are climbing through the scarf. And that, in spite of my mother was always taking such good care of me.

Whenever there was a chance, she would heat up water. And there were no showers, there were no bathtubs. There was a sink sometimes. And she would heat water. And she scrubbed me with this laundry soap. And she would scrub my hair. And she would wash my hair with petroleum, lighter fluid, to kill the lice.

How did you spend the days when you were left alone or even with your mother?

For a while, I remember being alone in the apartment, but that was mostly at nighttime.

And --

Yes. And during the day, I don't know, I was mostly always with my mother-- 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. And then we would play just in the apartment building, on the stairways or in a courtyard. But just at the very beginning. Later on, there were no children to play with.

And the only thing that we did is just try to stay safe, and hide, and try to feed ourselves. And there was nothing else in our life, just to survive another day, and another day, and make it through this blockade and that blockade. And they were all the time. They were constant. And--

Another time, we were caught. I don't know where I was with my mother, but we were caught in the blockade. And we hear that they are coming, and the soldiers, and the commotion. And we run into a building and we run up the stairs. And they were-- we hear the soldiers behind us. And there was nowhere to go.

So there was an open door and my mother and I hid behind that door, just against the wall, right behind the door. And there comes this young soldier, running up the stairs and he saw us. And he had his rifle pointing at us. And he yelled in Russian-- [RUSSIAN], get out, get out, I'm going to shoot. And my mother spoke perfect Russian. And we walked out from that door and we lifted our hands.

And my mother said, [RUSSIAN]. She said to him, don't shoot, don't shoot, we are going, we are going. And he chased us out, down on the stairs to the street. And we joined all the other people that were lined up there.

There were a lot of people. And we were running toward the Umschlagplatz. And the technique that worked the first time, for some reason we couldn't make it that way, like the first time. And we ended up in the Umschlagplatz, I remember. It seemed to me like there were thousands of people. And there were trains there, ready. And there were soldiers all over.

And there was an officer that stood in the middle of, or in front of the train. And he looked very polished, and shined, and he didn't say anything. And he was pointing one way. And he was pointing to the other way. And people would pass by him, one after the other. They were lined up, I think in fours, and they were-- he would go--

And at that time, I think this was the time when my mother was still working in that kitchen. And so, he was sending 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. And 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. And she-- and immediately-- and this took maybe a second and then the other people pushed from behind. So my mother grabbed me, and she didn't pay attention, and she ran with me the other way. And she wore a very large raincoat, and she just took me underneath her raincoat, covered me, and she ran with me.

And the Jewish policeman was pursuing us. He ran. And he said, he said for her to go that way. And the German said she has to go to the train. And my mother said, please, let me go, please let me go. And 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. And they were screaming and yelling at each other.

And he gave up and my mother ran away with me to-- there was 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. And 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.

Your mother's persistence.

Yes, she didn't-- 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. We went back to the ghetto. And-- and I don't know, we started moving on again to some places, hiding again. And we didn't have contact with anybody anymore, not with any of our relatives. We didn't see my brother anymore.

And my mother would tell me that 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. But we were constantly just hiding.

At one time, another time, we were-- there was again a blockade. And people running and running, and trying to hide, like mice that are poisoned, in panic. And I don't know what that place was. It was a big room. And there was a bed there.

And then there was a door and 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, just if-- and so a whole group of people ran in there. And we didn't know which way to go. And my mother said, go into the bed, inside. And she started lifting the blankets and the mattress. And there was another woman.

She shoved her away-- get away from there, my children are there, get away. And so we ran in panic. And we went behind that door with the rest of the people. And again, the same thing, very quiet. And suddenly we hear all the soldiers, and the dogs, and the shooting, and the screaming. And everybody is sitting there and trembling.

And suddenly we hear somebody being beaten up, and crying, and screaming. These children, they were dragged out from that bed, from inside that bed. And the woman, I don't know if they killed her on the spot, which there was-- but there was-- we heard people being beaten up, and cries, and screaming.

And 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 hidden there for a few hours and they didn't find us in that. So that's how close we came, yeah. And we made it another time.

Well, this must have been already 1943 or end of 1942. And everything-- there were fewer and fewer people. And it was very eerie and even though it was terrible before too, but I think that there was a feeling, 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. And my mother would say that they had a lot of literature, that they would print in Polish and Yiddish, that they would say, come out, and 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 to work on farms and to work in factories, 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.

How did you eat in those days?

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

Or water?

Well, sometimes in some places. Whenever there was a place where there was water, my mother would always scrub me, undress me and scrub me, always wash me.

For drinking?

For drinking, I don't remember. I don't remember what food we had.

You were living in the same apartment now or you moved around?

No, we were moving. I don't know where I was. Yeah, we were moving all the time. And just very few people and I was just with my mother. And then one night I remember my mother-- maybe she gave up and she felt lost, because she started washing her laundry at night. And she said, well, I'll prepare myself to be ready just in case.

And there were a few other people. And my mother would tell them about her son, if she just could make contact with

him, that he could save her. Because he looks Aryan. He looks so Polish. And he will survive the war. And if she knew where he is, we could be safe. And 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. And they were so envious.

But my mother said, well, where is he, I want to-- I'd like to find him. And so one night, I was sleeping and my mother was washing laundry, and a young Polish woman, very young, maybe a teenager, a blond girl came. And she says, you have anything to sell, to my mother. And my mother said, yes, I have a lot of things. I will give them to you for free if you do me a favor.

And she said, well, what can I do for you? And my mother said, well, I know this Polish man, I know where he lives, and he owes me money. And 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. And she told her where he lives. 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. Zeigler. I am in a desperate situation. I'm alone with my daughter. Please, come as soon as you can and help us, sincerely, Mrs. Zeigler.

And so she gave this letter to this young woman. And she delivered the letter that same night to my brother. It was just a couple streets away, I guess, from where we were. And from what my mother was telling about that, from what my-- she found my brother in the apartment. And she gave him the letter. And he opened it and before he even read it, he saw my mother's handwriting. My mother had a beautiful, very distinct handwriting.

And when he saw her handwriting, he almost fainted. And his landlady said to him, Marian, what's the matter? What does that-- what's the matter? And he said to her, oh, Mrs. [? Elevine, ?] this Jewish woman that was a friend of my parents before the war, I had no idea she's still alive. And she's still with her daughter in the ghetto and they are starving. I must find her, I have to help her.

So he came to us that same night. And I didn't remember my brother. He changed so much. When he came, he was so tall and he looked like a young man. And he was so handsome. And they fell into each other's arms. And my brother cried like a little child. And he said, I really don't want to live. My father is dead. I don't want to live.

And all the other ladies came and consoled him. Mr. Marian, you have a mother and you have a sister. You were so fortunate, you look so Polish. And control yourself. And here again, his composure, after he cried very much, he broke down terribly. And he sat down with my mother and he told her about all the time that we didn't see each other.

And he said to her that he was convinced that we were dead. He didn't think-- so he knew that the Jews in the ghetto were being killed. Well, we knew that they were not going to a vacation place, but I don't remember anybody talking that they sent us to extermination camps. Nobody heard about that. But we knew that whatever they sent us, it's not good because nobody is coming back.

Do you think your mother knew?

She, yes. She didn't-- it's hard to say. It was just in the manner of the way they were transporting people. And just the fear was there that they wouldn't make it. And because life was so cheap in the ghetto. Why would they send-- I think deep in their heart, they knew. I think my mother must have known.

But my father-- my brother, Marian, told my mother that I was so desperate, I was convinced that you and Nelly are dead. And 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 he told her, and I bought high boots, which was in style at that time. And he said, I drank a lot, vodka.

He says, and I spent most of my money. But he said, don't worry, I will make it. And I will sell the boots and I will sell the motorcycle. And I will save you. You will see. I will save you with Nelly. And everybody talked to him, Mr.

Marian, maybe you can arrange something for me, or for my daughter, for-- it was-- they knew that we were blessed to have him.

Well, anyway, 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 find-- get anything for me. And he figured out a plan, how to save us.

What a miracle.

And he had a brilliant plan, the only one that could have worked. There was no other plan that could have worked. And 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 Antonina [PERSONAL NAME] And it said that she was a single woman and from what province she comes from. And so he taught her about the area, supposedly where she was born, the name of her priest, her church. And he prepared her for everything.

Was her Polish speaking appropriate?

My mother's perfect Polish, yes. Yeah, my mother was educated well. She spoke perfect Polish, perfect German, and beautiful Russian, yes. But we looked Jewish. My mother didn't look so much Jewish because she-- I looked more Jewish. I had reddish hair. But we looked from the ghetto. We had the look, like the people in the ghetto.

And so 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. That 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 the 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 out to you, and then, a Jew, a Jew, a Jew.

One day-- 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-- he paid people on this side--

A bribe.

Bribe, yes, bribe. He bribed people inside the ghetto and bribed people on the outside of the ghetto and some Polish policemen. And 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, and these people would be there on this and this location, near the wall. And they would put a ladder and I would climb up. And he would be waiting for me on the other side. And I would jump and he would grab me. And that's how he would get me out.

And we followed that plan. And we went. It was very dark. And we went to that place and there was a group of men there. And they all stood, hiding behind some doorways. And another group put the ladder up and told me, climb up fast, go up, up. And I climbed all the way and my mother stood there, around too. And I climbed up and when I was all the way on the top, there was some shooting suddenly, shots were fired.

And I froze. And my mother froze. And everybody took off. Everybody ran away and my mother ran with them. Then she realized that she left me on the ladder. And I hear the voice of my brother yelling, jump, jump, now jump. And so I did. And he caught me. He just grabbed me and he ran with me into a building. And we stayed there for a while, hiding there.

And then we walked out in the street. And it must have been the middle of the night. There was nobody-- very few

people in the street. And he went with me to a little-- some kind of a nightclub, or a restaurant, or a bar. It was very dimly lit.

And there were little tables and chairs there for-- like in a little restaurant. And we sat in a corner. And he ordered for me the biggest sandwich I ever saw in my life. And also a bowl of-- I think it was the beets-- borscht, and potatoes. I don't remember seeing that kind of food. I had no recollection.

In your whole life.

Yes, I think so, yeah. And going back, a little bit before I left the ghetto, and early in the beginning of the ghetto-- I don't know, this was not in our apartment where we lived, but in some other place, which was-- there were windows that were overlooking across the wall. And I could see the other side, the Polish side. And I think this was the few times that my mother left me alone and I was sitting on a windowsill. And 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. And some, they were carrying these things for books. And 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.

And I was sitting and watching, and to me it looked like a movie, like the most wonderful sight that I never experienced. And I thought what a wonderful life is there behind that wall. And when my mother came home, I told her. And I would also ask her if we are ever going to have enough bread to eat. As much-- will I be ever able to eat as much bread as I want? And she would always say, yes, Nelly, you will see, after the war-- when the war ends, you can eat as much as you want.

Well, 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. And he said that 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. And he says this is-- I want you to remember all of that so that you can save your life and we can all be safe.

And he said to me-- he explained to me that he would take me to the apartment where he lives with this 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, that he would go to another room where he sleeps and that I shouldn't call him. I shouldn't call him by his name, I shouldn't call him for anything, and just pretend that he's a stranger.

Did you also speak good Polish?

I spoke Polish, yes. But my mother said that I picked up a little Yiddish accent in the ghetto from other children. But my parents spoke Polish most of the time. And so my brother too, yeah. So there was no problem in communication.

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

You were about seven then?

This was 1943, at the beginning, so I was-- in September of that year, I would have been eight. And I also forgot to tell you the preparation my mother made for me before I left the ghetto, that she put lipstick on my cheekbones to give me some color in the face. She put a tight handkerchief, a scarf, around my head and tied under my chin so I would look more like a Polish girl.

And they brought me into that place where he lived, and basically it was a kitchen. And it was also maybe third, maybe fourth floor. We walked up all the stairs. And when we walked in, he left me then with this Polish lady, and he went in the other room, and I didn't see him anymore.

And I remember the kitchen. There was one window and it was looking down to the courtyard. I had a place to sleep on the floor, some place in the corner. And I lied down and 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.

Well, the next day came and daylight, and I looked out in the courtyard and there were children playing there. In 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. And the landlady caught me right walking down the stairs. Oh, Jesus, Mary oh, Jesus, Mary she said and she grabbed me back into the apartment.

Do you know what her understanding was of who you were?

Yes, yes. My brother told her that-- of course, 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. He wants-- because my mother was left alone with me. And he would ask her permission if we could stay with her just for a couple of days and he would make arrangements for us to get away from there. But he wants to help us, he wants to save us.

So she knew that you were Jewish.

She knew, she knew. And she loved him very much. He was dating her daughter. She had-- the daughters, her daughters were older than my brother and he dated the girl who was about 19 years old. And I have a picture of them also, walking in the street. And 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.

But she had no idea ever that he would be Jewish or anything, absolutely none. No suspicion at all. And he would have a secretive life. He would disappear. But maybe she knew that he was in the underground, or not, this I don't know.

And what my brother was really worried about with this arrangement is that when my mother would come, because you see, I didn't look very much like my brother. I looked like my father. But my mother looked a lot-- my brother looked a lot like my mother, their features. And so he was worried that she would recognize some resemblance. So of course, he explained to my mother the same story, that she's not to speak to him and they have to act like strangers.

And my mother was supposed to come out of the ghetto the next day, I guess late in the evening, in a different-- completely different location. 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. And that was late afternoon, I believe.

And he would wait for her on the other side, but he explained to my mother that once she made her way out, she's not supposed to join him, just follow him. And he would take-- walk around the town. So, just in case if anybody saw anything or followed anything, not to make any connections that these two people are together. So he told her what time, where were to come, and so on.

And my mother came to that place. And she made her way underneath the fence. She had to climb. And 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. And he called her cat. That's what they called the Jews, because they were jumping fences, the ghetto, and trying to hide and jumping around. And so they referred to the Jews like cats.

And he told her, it's OK, it's OK, you can come out now. It's safe. And my mother got out. And the moment she was on the other side, he told her you come with me and he forced her into a building, in the back. And he told her, give me everything you have. If not, I'm taking you to the Gestapo right now. And he knew that she was being smuggled out of the ghetto and that she might have a little money with her, or jewelry, or something.

And she begged him, please. But he said, I will-- on this 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.

He had already been bought off, presumably?

Yes. Yeah, he was, I'm sure. That was not a incident that she was there, he was there and he was encouraging her to go. So my brother was aware of everything what was, but he stayed away and he waited. And my mother came out and they followed this plan. And he was walking all over and she was following him all over town. And he was smoking cigarettes, one after the other.

And finally, they got together in some place, the way it was planned. And my mother said, my god, you know what happened to me. He says, I saw everything. I saw everything. Keep cool, don't get nervous. It doesn't matter. I couldn't come, because it was too dangerous. We would both be in trouble. And so they went to the apartment and my mother joined me. And I was happy to see her. And my brother locked himself again behind the door, which I remember was very painful to see him go behind the door and not to talk to him.

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

So Mrs. [? Elevine-- ?]

[? Elevine. ?]

[? Elevine. ?]

Yes.

Knew your mother was Jewish.

She knew this was a--

Rather than your mother was passing as a Polish Catholic.

No, she knew this was a mother and daughter, Jewish, from the ghetto. And that he, my-- the friend of the family trying to save us from the Germans so we wouldn't be killed. She knew that. And he promised her that we wouldn't stay there very long, that he would make arrangements to get rid of us in a couple of days or so.

Did she have a husband? Was she married?

My mother?

You're-- the woman--

Oh, this lady, no, she was a widow. She was living there with her two daughters in the apartment, yes. 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. Because they had some offices 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.

And so my brother explained this to my mother. And he said-- she was prepared with the documents, and she memorized the prayers and her whole life history that he-- this fictitious life. And he told her to keep cool and be calm and say that she is in a desperate situation, where they had no job and no food. And 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?



And 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 would kill me. Well, this went on for a few days. It dragged on and on, because my mother couldn't find the-- surmount that courage to do it.

And they would go out. And he would take my mother to that place. And he would tell her where to go from afar. And he would wait away from there and watch from afar. And couple of times my mother went and turned back. She couldn't go through with it. And she cried. And she says, I'm dead, they will kill me on the spot. I can't do it well.

He talked to my mother like a father would talk to a daughter, to a child. This is your only chance. You cannot survive in Warsaw. 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. And you will find work there. And this is the only place safe for you.

Well, finally, I think on the third try, my mother did that. And 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. And he stood outside and he said that in this half an hour, or 45 minutes, or how long that took then, he said-- my mother said he smoked two packages of cigarette, waiting.

And finally, she came out and 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 that will be taking us to Berlin.

How did your brother know that people were actually being transported to where they said they were going to take them?

To Germany?

Mm-hmm.

Oh, well, he had no guarantees or anything. He told-- they told my mother that they would send her to Berlin and that's what she told him. And that's what he knew. But eventually, when we arrived, she corresponded with him. So we did maintain contact with him.

Well, Mrs. [? Eleveline ?] was very relieved to find out that we were leaving. And my brother took us to the railway station in Warsaw, like maybe 24 hours before the departure of the train. That's what they told us, that we had to go through some inspections, and make sure everybody's healthy, and doesn't have lice, and diseases, and things like that.

And my mother-- after the war, my mother figured out that this was probably the reason why my brother didn't come with us, because of that health inspection, that they would examine the body from the top to the bottom. And they would see that he was circumcised. And that was probably the reason that he didn't go through with a plan like that.

Well, he took us to the railway station and gave us some food, bread and salami, and packages. And we said goodbye. And he said that the next day, before the departure, he would come again and say goodbye to us. And 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 just stay by yourself as much as possible.

I also didn't tell you that he found a name for me. He told me that from now on my name is not Nelly Zeigler, but my name is going to be Stanisuawa Zugayska. And I have to memorize this name and 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.

And so we ended up in that railway station and there was a large group of people, talking and joking. And mostly young people, and mostly men, a few, not too many women. And it was a happy atmosphere, sort of.

Do you remember what time of year it was?

This must have been in March. Yes, it was. Because it was-- 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, yeah-- I think April 19.

Were any papers ever found for you?

No. No.

No papers.

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

Did she describe to you how it was when she went in to the German office to register to go to work.

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 that she felt in her heart. And she was just basically repeating everything that my brother told her to say. She followed that script. And she didn't remember very much about that, but she knew that she was terrified.

She knew that-- she wasn't sure if she would-- she feared that she would just collapse there and everybody would know who she is and where she came from. It was sheer terror. And because that's how we all felt, seeing a uniform, a German uniform in the ghetto.

And, well, we slept on a wooden platform. I remember it was wood, rough wood. And I slept next to my mother. And we woke up in the morning and we're all sore and waiting there for to be processed and all or that. And the next day, my brother came. But before they let him see us, he was called to the train-- to the railway-- to the station manager, the supervisor of that station.

Apparently, we stood up-- or stood out and we didn't fit with the rest of the group. We didn't look-- we were a little different. And they sensed it, the Polish people. And they were praying, some, when they went to sleep. I didn't do that, my mother didn't do that. And then we were just a little different.

And so somebody went to this station manager to tell him we think we have a Jewish woman and a Jewish kid here, maybe you want to do something about that. So when my brother showed up, the manager called him and he said, are you visiting this woman and girl? He said, yes. He said, do you know they are Jewish? And my brother said to him, yes, how much do you want?

And this man told my brother, I don't want any money from you. I'm a socialist. And I will just give you advice for them. Tell them to keep their mouth shut and not to talk to anybody and they will be all right.

What luck.

Yes. Well, you see, wherever we went, and wherever my brother went, nobody ever suspected him. He had that air about him. He acquired the mannerisms, and the behavior, and the speech from the people in the underground. He lived with them and he intentionally wanted to acquire this behavior also, with the smoking, and the drinking, and the clothes that he wore, the boots.

And then, he did look Polish. He didn't look like a Jewish boy, a typical Jewish. And then, he was very tall. He was over six feet tall at that time, very slim. And he was-- so he did not look like the typical Jewish boy from the ghetto. And nobody would ever, ever suspect him.

Did he have blue eyes also?

My brother had medium dark hair, wavy hair, very light complexion. And he had-- I think the color of his eyes was

greenish, sort of like mine, grayish green, very handsome. Very slim, very slim, long legs, long arms, very tall. And I have a son now, who is my younger son, who reminds me of my brother. He is 6-feet-4. And his posture, his height, and his smile reminds me of my brother.

Well, we made it finally into the train going to Berlin. And we sat. There were seats for two people here and two people on the other side in the train. And we sat by the window. And they gave us a loaf of bread and a jar of jelly for the trip. And we left for Germany.

And the people who faced us were-- everybody was in a talkative mood. And they did talk to my mother. And they said, why doesn't Stacia say the prayer, because when the train started rolling, they-- some of them, not everybody, but some of them would say the prayer.

And she would say, come on, Stacia, do it, say your prayers. And I didn't know what my mother was talking about. And she said, well, she's such a terrible, stubborn kid, she never does what I tell her to. And so that's how we got away with-- with that.

Did you understand it?

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

And then 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? And she would say, Stanisawa Zugayska. Every so often, I would say to her, what is my name?

And so, finally, I don't know how long the trip took, but we arrived. And we passed some other-- they lit big lamps-- big lamps. And they were shining it all over. Everybody had to undress completely. And they were checking body-- the whole body and everything. And they made pictures of my mother, of everybody-- grownups, not me.

And they gave her what is called, I think, a Kennkarte, like an identification paper. And they showered us. And so in that picture-- I had that picture and I cannot find it. I had that certificate. Maybe it is someplace in my house. But anyway, I looked at it a few years ago and so I remember it well.

And it said Antonina [INAUDIBLE], and the picture of my mother, with her hair wet, all put back. And she just looked like a skeleton from a concentration camp, drawn like that and had cheekbones coming out. And she had a number here on her chest. It was like they take a picture of a prisoner. And that was her ID paper. It was stamped in German.

Were you much thinner than everyone else on that trip?

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

Wasn't that obvious that you had a different kind of life and that would make them suspicious of you?

Yeah, well, I don't remember faces really of the people that were right around us. But generally, I remember like an impression of everything, that everything looked normal. Now everything outside the ghetto looked normal to me. Everything in the ghetto, it looked different. It was different, with the corpses--