

Janka found you?

Oh, wait a minute. Are we no?

Yes. And Janka, your housekeeper from Warsaw, took you back into Warsaw?

Yes. She came equipped with false documents from her relative. She put a little medallion on my neck.

What did the medallions say?

Virgin Mary.

The Virgin Mary?

Of course. And told me everything up to date, what happened to my family. I knew exactly where they were, in ghetto. I didn't even know there was a ghetto in Warsaw. I had absolutely no contact, so I didn't know anything at all.

But while we were going to Warsaw, she told me everything. She briefed me on everything what happened with my brother and sister. We had to cross another border. Germans were on both sides, near Malkinia, like I said, near Treblinka. And once we cross that border, she said, we'll get on a train, we'll go to Warsaw, which we did, no incidents. There was no problem.

Of course, I felt so secure. I was with her. It was different. I felt she's taking care of me.

Had you grown up with her since you were--

Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, she was with us since I was born.

She had cradled you in her arms and all--

Well, she was too small to cradle me, but--

How small was she?

Very tiny. We used to call her Little Lilliput, Little word, but she was very tiny.

Little Lilliput.

Yeah.

Were you passing as her daughter at this point or--

No, cousin.

Cousin.

No, no, a cousin.

And how did you get back into the Warsaw Ghetto once you got there, once you got back to Warsaw?

She told me-- yeah, she told me that there is a very unique way of getting to ghetto. The ghetto was in-- the ghetto--

This is kind of an unusual situation--

Yes, I was--

--because usually people, as I had said before, tried to get out of ghettos, and your task was to get into the ghetto.

Yeah, but I knew that my brother and sister were in ghetto. I. Had to get to ghetto. I have to be with my brother and sister. Where else should I go?

Did you ever think for one moment that you would try to go somewhere else just to save your own life--

No.

--if you were not with your--

No such thing.

Why?

Like to Russia, for instance, right.

I don't know. No, no. Later, I felt too guilty that I was not with them. I just wanted to be together, and I just didn't know that there would be a Final Solution.

No idea at that point?

No.

Not even after all the stories--

I saw atrocities, everything.

--in Bialystok?

I don't know. Somehow I felt that some of us will survive, that it won't be a systematic extermination. It's just what came later and I realized-- and I knew that I cannot fall in their hands because I won't have another chance once they get hold of me. But at that time, I felt, well, there are other people. They can't kill everybody.

And Janka-- there was a very unique way-- since Warsaw Ghetto was in the middle of Warsaw, there were streetcars, and there was a streetcar going from one-- because Warsaw Ghetto already had a wall. It was about 6 or 7 feet. I don't remember. But there were broken glass cemented on the top so you could not--

--climb over.

--climb over. So you had to find a way, loose bricks or bribe the sentries. There were three sentries, Germans, Polish police, and Jewish police. And I knew-- Janka briefed me on everything, but she said-- the best way, she said, my way-- because she was-- by that time, she became a steady visitor to the ghetto because she was bringing food.

She was a smuggler, basically.

She became a professional smuggler, and all the money what she made she supported my family. That was her-- whatever she did, she smuggled, she was buying things from other Jews, selling at profit, and buying food for us. And later--

And getting it somehow back into the ghetto again.

Well, she was bringing-- there were a lot of Polish smugglers, so she became a smuggler. She never came empty-handed. She would sell-- some of it sell, and some would bring us.

And always go out of the ghetto, come back in again.

Yeah, she had her own already ways of-- she knew who to bribe. She became such a steady fixture in ghetto. Everybody knew her.

All through '41 and '42, which is what we're talking about?

Yes. Yeah.

Why do you think she did this?

Oh, she loved my mother. She was very devoted to us. My mother was very good to her. There was a very big tragedy. She was raped by her own brother-in-law, who was a real animal, and my mother took care of her during the pregnancy and later. She was with us like a child. She was part of the family as long as I remember. She was my mother's confidant. She was part of the family.

When your mother had-- after your mother died, she transferred her--

She took over. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

--her love and her attention--

She knew that she--

--from your mother to you.

--had to care of us. We were her family. We were her family.

So she got you into the ghetto?

No. She went with me. She said, let's-- we'll get on the streetcar, and when we turn the corner, we'll just jump. They usually slow down, and we jump. Of course, there are usually police there or--

Is this this famous tramway that--

That's the famous tramway. But usually there were informers on the platforms, so-- somehow she spotted them. She said, don't jump now. And she already had prepared a band for me. She said-- she put it in my pocket on the streetcar, and that was my downfall because I had in the pocket a band.

A Jewish band.

Jewish band.

Arm band.

And I had no documents. I had-- actually, she kept the documents. We had a little basket, and she kept my documents, a certificate of some relative. We couldn't jump, so we went to gain from the ghetto. We stepped outside, wait for another opportunity.

And the same informer-- it was probably a plainclothes policeman-- arrested me. He said, you were trying to get out of

the ghetto. I said no. He slapped me around.

He said you were trying to get out of the ghetto?

Yeah. He saw me on the streetcar, and he couldn't believe me because it was crazy story, that I'm trying to get in. Apparently, kids were trying to get out. I mean, there was a big traffic going on. I didn't know about those things. And they were catching kids every day trying to get out. So he couldn't believe my story that I was trying to get in, so he arrested me.

He was a Pole?

Yes.

Polish police? Informer?

Informer, yeah, plainclothes.

In cahoots or--

Well, they all were.

Plainclothes.

Yeah, yeah. And he saw the band in my pocket, so it was obvious that I was lying. So they--

So he--

Janka followed us, and they took me to a police station, threw me in the cell, and it was a very cruel three days there. I was crying and screaming that I wanted to go home, that I want to get into ghetto. And of course I was thrown into a cell with prostitutes, and they were very, very cruel.

I guess I wore that little medallion, and that's what triggered their hysteria because they started to beat me up, fucking Jew, you Jewish scum.

Who wears the medallion--

Yeah, how dirty, and so on.

--of the Virgin Mary around her neck, yes.

And they were just-- they were like beasts. They were like animals. They spit in my soup. They cleaned their noses in my food. They would not let me use the pail, so I made in my pants, so I got even more.

And then after a few days, a policemen came. He said, I'm taking you out. And they were jeering. You're going to Gestapo. I didn't know where I was going. But then I pleaded with him, where are you taking me? He said, well, to your own people. That's where you want to be.

Saw he was working with me. He said he's taking me to ghetto. I was glad. It's a very funny story. He just decided that he has to relieve himself, and he-- near the ghetto, there were some-- probably ruins or whatever, and he decided to-- and he was kneeling with his pants down, and I ran. And I ran into the ghetto through a hole, and right on the other side I was caught by a Jewish policeman who beat me up again, troublemaker, trying to get out, you're rats.

By the time I looked like a mess. I didn't look human after those few days in that cell. And he grabbed me by the neck and took me to-- it was a detention center next to the Judenrat to a quarantine. From there, I would go to quarantine and

from there to a--

Back to ghetto?

No, no, to the prison, Jewish prison. But of course I don't think many people got out of there.

The Jewish prison was not a good place to be stuck in.

No, of course not.

Because?

It's just-- the people which landed there-- they were already half-human anyways and just starved.

They died there?

Well, some of them died later. They were shot for smuggling, kids mostly, mostly kids. And they took me there, and I was screaming and yelling, I want to go home. My brother and sister are here. And I was yelling absolutely-- I would not give in.

And of course I didn't look like anything. I looked like a mess. And all of a sudden, the door opened, and somebody started to yell, why don't you shut up? I can't work. And I recognized that was my cousin, Ignatz, who worked at the post office. There was a post office that was in the Judenrat. It was there in that detention center before they took me to quarantine, and I started to scream "Ignatz."

For a minute, he just-- and then he recognized me. And the policeman beat me up again for screaming. And when I started to scream "Ignatz," and he said, oh my God. We're all going crazy. Apparently, Janka went to ghetto and finally told him, I found her, and I lost her. And they were all--

You mean they're all going crazy because--

--going crazy--

--they'd find you and then lost you?

--trying to find all kinds of ways how to get me out. And he said to the policeman, this is Alek's sister, and the policeman just-- completely pale. My brother knew him socially. He knew him. But he didn't know what an animal he was. And if I would not be Alek's sister, I would always say.

And Alek was a person--

Yeah, Alek was my brother.

No, but I mean, he was a person of importance in the ghetto?

Not importance. He just-- they knew each other. Yeah, he knew each-- my brother-- he was quite-- yeah, he became a journalist after the war. And they knew each other.

And so they called my brother. Somebody sent for my brother. On principle, my brother never took rickshaw. I don't know if you know that the rickshaw is the Warsaw Ghetto.

It's the carts with the person in front of it.

Yes, that was the means of--

--transportation.

--transportation in ghetto, and he grabbed the rickshaw and took me out of there, brought me home. And my sister, of course, right away stripped me, smeared with naphtha. For three days and nights, she was scraping me and-- until I start to look like a human being. That's how I got into ghetto.

How did you survive in the ghetto? Was there food?

Janka was supporting us. She had some valuables. My mother-- she was selling. And we survived thanks to Janka.

How often would she come in and out?

Oh, sometimes every day.

Really?

Oh, yeah.

Leave the ghetto, come back.

That was her profession, smuggling. Every two days--

What would she bring?

Well, she would go to the countryside, buy from peasants things or bring them some rags, or some dresses, or something she would buy in ghetto with profit, and there was like a barter. And we had a little room which my brother's relatives-- because he was my half-brother. He's part of the family. An uncle gave him a room. That was his former office. And we had a little room together, so we stayed together.

Good quality? You had like a WC or something like that? [CROSS TALK]

Compared to like everybody else, we had luxury. We had running water. We had a toilet. Because that uncle was not taken out from his apartment. We stayed in the same apartment, which was in a very nice building. So they really-- they were rather lucky. They were able to save their apartment and helped himself by selling everything.

My second question was, how did you stay off the list? How did you stay out of the hands of--

There was no list.

How did you stay--

They were in ghetto like everybody else. It was a waiting room for death, which we didn't know at that time. That was--

Well, that's right. We're still early.

Beginning of October '41.

We're still early. That's right. We're still early.

What would you do-- what did you do every day with your time?

I became a walking library, and I also studied.

Where?

All the very little groups. There were a lot of professors and teachers. They were hungry, and for a piece of bread they would teach you. It was a very intensive way of learning because you didn't have to pass exams. And I-- libraries were illegal, but people had a lot of books. We liked to read.

So you would have sort of like a little library, and you would hire kids like me. And I would walk around, and I would have a list of people where I would go to and a list of books. And they would give me an order what kind of book to bring, first choice, second choice. And I would bring the book, and I would get some bread or something for it.

And also I study a lot, and I read a lot. Books were like a weapon against despair. So I had quite an education there. Of course, winter was very bad because I had no shoes, so I had to share it with my sister whenever she went out. I had to stay home.

And then people couldn't get new stockings, or socks, or anything, so I learned how to mend stockings and socks. And I got money for it, or bread, or basically just to survive, not to starve. And Janka was helping.

And then the terror started in-- winter was very bad because we had to surrender all our fur coats and everything, and a fur coat or anything with a fur-- it was not luxury. It kept you warm. It was a blanket. It was--

We're now in winter of '41, '42--

--everything.

--right?

Yes. We had no coat. The glass would freeze in-- the water would freeze in a glass. That's how cold it was. So we stayed in bed just to keep warm and not to be so hungry.

Did you have girl friends, or did you have a social life at all? Or tell me--

I don't know what you call social life. My brother wanted I should be with people my own age, and I had a friend. Her name was Danuda. She was my role model, older than me, a few years older. She was the most beautiful human being.

And she sort of took me under her wing, and I was very close with her. Her brother, Richard, was my boyfriend, my first boyfriend. He was a medical student. And I spend a lot of time with her. She gave me books. Whenever I could have some sort of a social life, that was with Danka and her crowd. So I sort of became part--

Danka is Danuda?

Danuda, yes. So I became sort of like a part of a grown-up crowd. I was so much more mature than normal kids my age.

How old were you at that point?

In 1941 I was 15 already.

Was Richard the medical student?

Yeah, Richard was the medical student. And then in April, around April '42, they started to come at random, pick people up, and just kill them. We didn't know who.

Later, they told us that some people were involved in distribution of illegal papers or whatever. Different people, bakers and intellectuals, and they were just coming up at night, and taking them out, and shooting them.

Who are they? Germans?

Germans, yeah.

Randomly?

Randomly. So the horror-- the terror was because my brother could have been there. They had lists, and they were just coming with a list and taking out people. And typhus was rampant. That was another horror.

Typhus?

Typhus, yeah, typhus because there was a typhus epidemic and especially where we lived on that street. It was more like a passage. It's a very-- like in an old city, Karmelicka Street. It was more like a passage. And people had no place where to go, so there were like people from wall to wall. You just saw somebody, and you got that his lice. And that's it. They were disease carriers, so the epidemic. And then--

How do you avoid-- how do you avoid that?

Well, we didn't. In that house where I was, my aunt died of typhus. My cousin survived. I survived. My other cousin died. But the worst part was that there was no medication, and you just, if you were strong or survived. Or you did or you didn't. That's all it was.

And later, seeing naked corpses was just a common sight in ghetto because people wanted to get-- we were getting about 200 calories. I don't know how many. Calories didn't mean anything to me. At that time, I didn't know what means "calories." I know that we got a little bit something, some bread which was mixed with sawdust or whatever.

But still, there was something. So if somebody died of typhus, people just stripped them and put them on the street. So the burial society would pick them up, and he would be still on the list that he could get some food. So they were getting rid of the corpses so there should be more--

So the rations would keep on coming in?

Yes, that's right. That's right.

Do you remember how-- your body goes through a lot of changes when you start-- when you're starving. Do you--

I lost my period. I was fainting all the time. I was blacking out.

Did you lose a lot of weight?

I was skinny, but I had a big, bloated stomach. I was probably-- but of course I wasn't as starving as other people. Janka was still bringing us some food.

You once mentioned these [NON-ENGLISH]. Can you say anything-- [NON-ENGLISH], these two young boys?

Yes. Because happiness was if you could go and buy 100 grams of bread. That was such achievement for me to go and buy some bread and bring it home. And the ghetto had these half-insane, half-starved young people which-- they were just standing and watching in front of the bakery. If somebody came out with bread, they would just grab it and eat it.

And it happened to-- once happened to me. I was walking around with a book, so he grabbed the book. And he saw it wasn't bread, so he hit me with it. And once I was coming out, and he grabbed my bread. And I was fighting with him, and he ate it. And I ate the rest. I just couldn't bring it home. I was like fighting for my life or that piece of bread.

And there were corpses on the street covered with some paper and brick. People just-- if they die on the street, people

just stripped them to get some rags, or shoes, or whatever they had to keep warm. Because in December '41, we had to give up our furs and-- I don't think-- I don't think blankets but anything which-- and again, so we were cold.

So you were starving, and you were cold.

And we were breaking up the furniture--

--to make fire.

--to make fire, to make some soup once a day. At least that was our meal. And--

What would you make the soup from?

Oh, I had some rotten potatoes, half-frozen, and turnips. And Janka would bring us some grain, so I would just throw it in in a pot, and we had something, something warm, some gruel.

And June '42, Czerniaków committed suicide, and that was a sign of expulsion from ghetto. They had to fill a quota between 6,000 and 10,000 people a day. So to fill the quota, they were taking people straight from the streets, from hospitals.

Every day?

Yes.

6,000 to 10,000?

No from 6,000 to 10,000 people a day.

A day?

Yes.

Had to be delivered by--

--delivered to Auschwitz. Sorry, delivered to Umschlagplatz.

By the Jewish authorities?

Yes.

And so who was picking whom up?

Jewish police.

Jewish police were picking up--

Yeah.

--Jews--

Yeah.

--to fill the quota?

Yeah. But mostly they were cleaning up people which were already in the quarantine or hospitals.

Or in that cell that you escaped from or whatever.

Oh, yes, yes.

Those were the first to go, I assume, yes.

And--

So when you first heard that--

Oh, I had instructions from my brother-- see, I started to-- since I knew that we have to-- we're going to be sent to the East to work-- and I came from the East. I wasn't afraid. I was dumb. And I said, we'll work, and we'll manage.

And my uncle, who was a good friend of Adam Czerniak^{3w}, the chairman of the Judenrat-- when he heard that Czerniak^{3w} committed suicide, took a cyanide, cyankali, he made a remark, which escaped me at that time. He said, but he had enough for the whole Judenrat.

I saw the drawer full of-- he had two dozen, and there were about 24, 25 members of the Judenrat. And he's the only one who committed suicide. As far as my uncle was concerned and my brother, they realized that it was a warning. I guess it wasn't a warning enough because the mind just doesn't absorb anything like that.

Because Czerniak^{3w}, in your view, could not take the responsibility for delivering those Jews up or what?

Obviously, obviously.

Umschlagplatz-- did you see that yourself?

Oh, no, no, no, no.

Oh, you never got close?

No. If I would be, I wouldn't be here.

That would mean that was the end.

No, that would be the end.

Was the Umschlagplatz in the ghetto?

Yes.

But you never got near?

No, no, no. It was an old Jewish hospital, which was cleaned, cleaned up. People were taken out, and that became the transit.

From there.

From there, they went directly--

Trains?

--to the trains to Treblinka.

The trains were on the Umschlagplatz?

Yes.

They pull the railroad--

Yes, that's right.

--through all the way there, and--

At the beginning, people still bribed their way out. There were some people still escaping from Umschlagplatz. The Jewish police was still-- they could still bribe their way. Members of the police-- their families were exempt. They were still safe. People still have some documents. If you have a sewing machine, you could become part of a shop and work.

And there were different exemptions, but later the papers were nothing. It wasn't worth it. It was just a sham. And I remember I took a knapsack, and I started to put my name on it. And my brother saw it, and he became completely violent. He just threw that knapsack together with me against the wall. He said, you're not going anywhere.

You were ready to go to--

Yes, I prepared myself, that my time comes, I'll just go with the knapsack because you were allowed to take, I think, 15 pounds with you, whatever.

So you knew where you were-- you knew what was going to happen and you prepared yourself?

No, I didn't know what was going to happen. I thought that we're going to be sent to the East and we'd be walking. I didn't know, not at all.

But your brother did?

Your brother--

I guess he did because he said, you promise me-- he gave me instructions where to hide. And you promise me that you won't let them catch you? You'll just run, and run, and hide, run and hide. Whatever happens, run and hide. He felt that bullet would be easier than the gas chambers. By that time, people started-- there were a few escapes from Treblinka, but my brother never told me.

There were escapees that you heard much about that?

I forgot to mention that my sister escaped from ghetto before, and she was on the other side already in April. Her fiance was killed, and she just decided-- the next day, she just escaped from the ghetto.

And lived incognito.

Incognito, yeah, and became a smuggler together with Janka, and was smuggling, became a smuggler.

What did she smuggle?

Food, the same day, barter, buying, and selling, and they're going to the countryside and became a smuggler together with Janka. And I was there with my brother.

My sister had no problems. She was able to blend in. She never had any problem at all. She was 10 years older than me

with more courage than I did. And--

So your brother said to you, no way you are going to Umschlagplatz, no way?

No. He didn't say "Umschlagplatz." Don't let them catch you.

Because--

You have to run and hide, run and hide.

You started to say some people had come back from Treblinka. You mean had made it--

Escaped from the trains.

--escaped from the trains, knew what was happening--

Apparently, yes.

--and came back to Warsaw?

Well, I realized what happened when they took away Korczak and the children. Because I heard when they said that they tried to get Korczak out and he refused to go, he would not leave the children. And in my stupidity I said, well, why would he-- why did they try to save him? Save from what? After all, he is-- he takes care of the children. Why would he not go with the children? And there was no answer. Then I realize.

And then I had no papers. So my brother still had some papers, so he could legally be still in the ghetto. He was not-- he was still able to maneuver somehow because there was no food. Janka could not get into ghetto, so we're cut off from Janka, from my sister.

And then the Germans came with Ukrainians, and with the Lithuanians, and with dogs, and usually started at 10:00 in the morning and finish at 4:00 or 5:00.

Every day?

Every day. Oh, yes, every day, yeah.

Where are we now in time?

July.

Still '42?

'42, yeah, mass deportations. I was still in ghetto. I had-- I wasn't legal anymore. I had no documents. And my brother couldn't take care of me, so Richard found a hiding place. He camouflaged in the attic, like a hiding place where I was there with his mother, and with his mother and with his sister.

And I used to stay with them. I felt that it's safer with them.

Danka?

Danka and her mother. And we were close-- and Richard would close from the outside some old junk, furniture, and everything so it looked completely hidden. Of course we it could have been our tomb. We could have been entombed because he stayed outside. So he was the one who locked us in and was able to open the whole thing.

And in one of those-- in one of those raids we heard shooting, and apparently, what we did know, somebody else had the same bright idea. It was-- the other side of the courtyard was the same-- similar hiding place. And the Ukrainians came with dogs, and they smelled them out.

Because when they came to the, courtyard the police would yell, everybody has to come down. Whoever doesn't come down will be shot. And a lot of people came down, and they were taken away. And those-- and then they would go and check the apartments. And if they would find somebody, they would just shoot them.

These were not Germans?

Well, Germans together with the Lithuanians and Ukrainians. But they had dogs at that time already, so they could smell. And apparently they found that hiding place, and they shot the people. But of course, there was such carnage there, so they left us alone. They didn't look any further. I guess the dogs were happy with all that blood and everything.

So you were just lucky.

I was lucky. Yes, of course, everything was luck. I had no blueprint for survival. Everything was luck. Everything was luck. Instincts, luck? I don't know what to call it. Is it luck? I don't know.

And a few days later, Richard was shot. And he told-- he told me that he won't-- they won't take him alive. He had a knife on him, but I don't think he used it. I don't know how he died. I know that he was hiding in a lumberyard near ghetto, and he was found by a Ukrainian with a dog. And he was shot.

Who told you?

Well, there were other people who had survived. There were always--

Always got reports back.

Reports coming back. They found-- yeah. And then-- and his sister, Danka, and her mother were sort of lucky, more lucky than I was because they had some papers working in a shop. So again I was on my own.

I was on my own, but a few days later, they came to that shop. They liquidated that shop. They felt that it's not necessary, and they took them away. Everything was a sham. They would-- just give them false security.

They took them away.

Danka and her mother. They took them away, even though they had papers.

And where were you at this point?

Well, I was hiding in empty apartments, scavenging, because--

You're all on your own.

I was on my own, and at night, I would come back where my brother was because my brother was working in a shop. But during the day, I just had to hide. So I became like a little-- they used to call it us the wild-- the wild ones, which means we had no right to be there. We were-- we had no right to be in ghetto.

In Polish?

Dziki.

Dziki?

Dziki. That means a wild one, yeah.

Were there a whole group of--

No, no, no, you were on your own because--

Did you meet any other kids that--

Well, of course.

You knew-- you knew--

We were like wolf packs. Whatever-- it was no-- there was nothing systematic. There were no-- we had no plans or anything.

But you had kids to talk to about what was going on and what was happening.

No, no, no, no, no. I just had my brother. No, no. There were kids. Kids went first. I escaped because I looked big.

So you were one of the few kids.

Yes, because they took away my cousin's children. Tolek was 14. They took him away. Risha was 11. They took her away. The kids were taken off. They wouldn't let the parents go with the children. So the kids were taken away. There was no such thing that a kid had a right to be there.

How long did you continue like this?

My brother told me that I have to try to stay alive and I will not survive here. I have to get out. And I said, no. He said, well, you will get out. I promise you. Janka and my sister--

Anna.

--Anna are there, and they'll find you a safe place. And I was terrified. I didn't want to go. I said, I want you-- I said, if we die, we die together. And my brother said, look, I can't. I'm circumcised. I look Jewish. I won't survive there in one day.

You didn't want to leave him.

I didn't want to leave him. And my brother said, I can't save you. I won't be able to. And please, there is a chance. And my brother had a friend who was a policeman, Polish policeman. As a matter of fact, that man survived the war, and my brother helped to rehabilitate him. He was a witness at a Strop's process. Strop was the commandant of the-- against the ghetto uprising in Warsaw, was hanged in 1962.

He saved a lot of people, Pawel Golombek, not for money, no. My brother knew him-- there was some connection through some other friends. I won't go into it. It was-- and became a safehouse.

He took me out. The point was to get me out of ghetto with a group of people, which are going to work which--

Like the old escape route in Bialystok?

A similar escape. That's right. And then Pawel Golombek came with some fancy-looking papers that he-- to that place where I was working near the airport. It was somewhere Okecie, near the airport. I remember some greenhouses there. And he said, I came to pick her up, with my name and everything, and everybody said, that poor child. That's the end of

her.

It was a ruse, and he took me, brought me to his house. And then Janka, and she had money. And she said, I want to get you false documents. There's another family attorney, Czerniakowskis, which were our friends, my mother's friends. And we'll get papers for you.

You're outside of the ghetto now?

I was already outside.

At the Golombek's? That's outside--

In that policeman's house, yeah. There were more people. There were like-- like a train station they're coming in, a bus station.

What did you call it? A transit house you called it?

Yeah. No, safehouse.

Safehouse.

But it was like a train station. Everybody was--

Jews coming and going.

There were so many Jews going in and out.

All through--

They were not afraid.

All through Mr. Golombek's--

That's right.

--services.

His whole family was involved in helping Jews. His wife-- her brother was the most incredible human being. He looked like a hoodlum, vicious-looking on the street. He helped me because he did look like a hoodlum, so whenever I had to go from one place to the other, he was walking with me, and they felt that he was sort of like an informer who was taking me somewhere.

Oh, yeah. He died in the uprising, not in ghetto uprising, the Warsaw Uprising. And another brother was very involved, the whole family. It was the most amazing family, not for money.

Why did they do it? Do you know?

People did it for many reasons. Some were real Christians, so they were helping. The other ones felt that-- called us the Christ-killers, so they were killing us. Some people were doing it for love. Like my brother was saved by the woman whom he married later, Catholic woman. She was in the underground.

Some people did it for money, greed, a very powerful motivator, greed, money. So they were taking money. And some of them came through, saving them even when the money ran out, and some of them denounced them. There was not one reason, different races, just as many people.

And Czerniakowskis were also a very funny family because they were Polish nobility. That man was a typical anti-Semite before the war, Polish officer. And yet-- he was with the AK, which was very anti-Semitic. That's the Polish army, Armia Krajowa, which were-- they were killing Jews.

And yet he was an administrator in the apartment building, and that was very important because he was able to register me as one of the tenants. So my documents-- I became sort of-- it was--

Non-Jewish?

No, no, non-Jewish of course. And Janka came, and she said, well, we have to get you a document now. We got, ein Blanko, a birth certificate from a priest, just plain, and Mr. Czerniakowski said we should get some names, somebody. Let's make up some story, some legend, somebody maybe close to the Russian border that they can't trace, nobody from Warsaw and so on. You should make it-- it should make some sense.

And I remember my friend, Irena, who I thought died in that fire-- and in that year and a half we were together, we became best friends. I knew everything about her. She knew everything about me. And I became her.

And I was able to make up a story, everything, her parents' names, everything, was her persona.

You used her name?

Oh, yes. I used her name and everything. And that's-- since she was born near the Russian border, Lomza. So if they wouldn't trace to-- if they wouldn't look too closely, I was OK. If they would go to the church where she was baptized and check the papers, then I would be in trouble. But everything else made sense.

I was registered in that building. Czerniakowskis were my cousins. Then I had to go and get a Kennkarte, like a--
--ID.

--ID with my own picture. So that was a very traumatic experience because if I'll go to a photographer, and he'll denounce me, right? So Leshka went with me. We played sort of like we're two students, cousins, and so on. And I didn't know that woman photographer was in the underground, so I was safe there. But she did not tell me-- I didn't know many things, that they were in the underground Leshka and her father, the whole family. The less--

Who was Leshka?

Leshka was Czerniakowski's daughter. She was 19 years old. She was helping out. And later, she became my contact when I was in Germany. I was sending letters to her and building up my legend, completely different history, my fake life, became who I was.

So I got my pictures. We went to the German manpower. I got my Kennkarte, my pass, buiro, and everything. So I had the documents, so fine. Everything was fine.

My hair was bleached. My brother bleached my hair before I escaped. But unfortunately, many people have the same ideas, and it was a very cruel joke going around Warsaw. How do you recognize a Jew? Oh, they bleach their hair, and their papers-- and their documents are perfect.

I think-- and I had to pass as an Aryan, and that was a very tough thing to do. I knew religion very well. I wasn't circumcised. I knew the mentality and the customs of an average Pole.

You probably knew how to swear in Polish by then.

Not then yet, and I learned very fast. But that saved me. But my fear-- since-- and yet they had an uncanny way of

finding people. It became like a national sport to track down a Jew. A German would not recognize me. A Pole would, and they did.

And they had those packs of hooligans and real scum, which were-- their profession became denouncing Jews, bleeding them, taking everything away from them, and then giving them away for a bottle of vodka with some-- I think the going rate was 100 zlotys. I'm not sure, to the authorities.

So there were-- there were-- they had-- there were offers--

Oh, yeah. That was very common.

Were you aware of all this before you took on this identity?

Of course I was. Of course I was. But my brother felt that I have a chance. In ghetto, I will not have a chance. The next round-up, and I'm finished. So at least try. And I was--

You were just about outside of the law starting around July 1942 and were now--

I escaped in August.

And you escaped in August?

In August.

Out of the ghetto?

Yeah. Golombek took me out in August. And--

And now you've--

Very-- my sister gave me a gold bracelet, she said, in case they'll follow you or something, just give it to them as a bribe. That was stupid because you have to brazen your way out, and I was so terrified. And I couldn't.

So when they approached me-- they sort of surrounded me, called me a cat-- they used to call Jews cats.

In Polish?

Stray cats, you know.

In Polish?

In Polish, kot, kocico. That was their nickname for escaped Jews. I threw the bracelet at them, which was really smart because there were three of them, so there were so busy grabbing that bracelet that I escaped.

But I only had two safe homes, that Czerniakowskis, which was across the river, and Golombek was not far from the ghetto. And just to go from one place to the other-- it was like a trip to the moon.

So you couldn't stay there, really.

No. I couldn't-- they would never turn me away. When I had really no place where to go, I would show up, and they would take me in. And they would let me-- give me some food, or some money, or give me some hot meal, let me wash. And again, but I just couldn't-- I couldn't put them all on jeopardy.

And your sister?

My sister, yes, at some times I was saying with-- she was living with a woman in a very-- in a slum area. She became a smuggler. And she was living with a woman who was doing the laundry, an old woman. She blend in.

And then once I was in the safehouse, somebody denounced me, and police came. A Polish policeman came and took me to the police station. I had my documents, but I got a severe beating. So I forgot when I was born, and I really told them that I was born October 23. And on my documents I was born in July. It didn't take them long to get it out of me.

Now, Janka followed me at that time. She was there when they arrested me, so she ran to my sister. And my sister wasn't too far, or she was leaving that. She went to the police station. She talked to the police, and she bribed them. She said, yes, she's Jewish, but I know the family. I used to clean their homes there. I used to work for them, and they were good people. They helped me, and so on, made a whole story.

And she made a deal with him, 15,000 zloty. It was a lot of money. And she only had 8,000 or 9,000 on her. She gave him that money and promised that if they will let me out, she'll give him back the rest tomorrow. And she did, and they let me out. Of course I couldn't go back there. But she told him that one day we'll finish you, the underground will finish you, which they did.

Eventually, he was killed, but not because of me, because that was a racket going there. They never wanted to take me to Gestapo. They just wanted to get money, as much as they could. Maybe if they wouldn't they would, probably. But as long as there was a chance that somebody would pay them off, I was safe in the police station. Germans were not involved yet.

And then sometimes-- and Janka became my-- and since I was so traumatized, I just wanted to go back. But Janka said-- you want me to stop now?

Mm-mm.

And Janka-- it was like-- became a full-time occupation for your Janka just to take care of me, go to friends and relatives and pay them just they should keep me for a few days, and beg them, please keep her for a day or two. And if they-- she couldn't find any place, so I was crisscrossing Warsaw. And when she couldn't find a place, she would just take me to a station, and we would sleep there, waiting for the train sort of. Or we would sleep in fields or in doorways.

I could not stay with her sister and her brother-in-law. Her brother-in-law was an absolute beast. He was Always drunk, and he was always threatening to kill me if she wouldn't get that bloody Jewess out of there. So we would pay him with vodka.

And he was a bricklayer and also some janitor in that-- she was living in the slums of Warsaw. And there was like a tool shed in the back of their house. So he would go away, and they would lock me up in that shed, close me from outside. So they had the keys, so he didn't know I was there.

How long would you be locked up for?

Nobody should know that they--

[CROSS TALK].

For a whole day or at night, whatever. And when the coast was clear, they would let me out.

How were you feeling through this crisscrossing, going back and forth, not having a place? Did you feel at any point like, I'd rather die, I can't-- I don't want to do this--

That, yes.

What was going on inside you?

Yes, yes. When I felt that I won't survive and my sister will be killed because of me-- and then I said, I'm going back to ghetto. But they said, no, you have to try. You have to try. Janka said, no, you try. We'll make it. Because if you die, Alek will die, and Hanka. It's sort of like-- I don't know why I had the idea that if one of us dies, we all will go, sort of like we were like together, like symbiosis.

I don't know. Just that feeling that if I'll give in, they all go. And I have to-- but of course, by that time, I was completely-- I had no other feelings except fear and will to survive, just to-- another day, and another day. It was a question of-- you lived from hour to hour, never mind from day.

Was that cycle broken at some point? Did you get out of there?

From where?

From Warsaw?

Janka decided that maybe I'll be safer in the country. I was afraid to go to the country because at least when you're in a big city you can run, you can hide. I was terrified. But they felt that I'll never survive, and money was running out.

And Janka went with me, and we were sort of going from farm to farm, looking for a job and everything. And there was a little hamlet between Radzymin and [NON-ENGLISH], also on the way-- everything was on the way to Treblinka, that direction.

And I looked, I guess, strong. By the time, I spoke like a slum kid. every second word was like a swear word. I became so completely-- well, a streetwise kid. Being with Janka all the time and with all those animals, with that slum, I learned fast. And Janka trained me. She said, if you be delicate, you'll never survive. You have to be a tough kid, and swear like the rest of us, and that's it.

Did you get into it for real?

Oh, yes, very well, very much so, very much so, very much so, yeah. And they gave me a job. I was working on that farm. That peasant was the most brutal, ignorant man, very religious, who had to pray before meals after meals before I went to bed but then I had to go to church on Sunday because they were going.

Well, the first week, I said, I didn't feed the pigs yet, or this and that, but then I knew that if I won't go there'll be trouble. And I went to church with them, and maybe somebody spotted me.

Were you afraid that if you went to church-- there's too many people together.

Too many people.

You might be recognized.

Who are you? And I pretend that my parents were killed in the war, and I'm just an orphan from Warsaw, and I don't want the Germans should take me to forced labor to Germany because by that time, there were rounding up Gentiles, taking them to work, forced labor. So I made up a story. And, well, I prayed with the rest of them, and I went to confession.

Were you harassed during confession at all?

Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I just made up a story, and it was fine. The priest was OK.

He never asked you, where did you come from, or--

I told him, from Warsaw. I didn't tell him the real thing. I made up a story. My father was a prisoner of war. He was a-- maybe he's killed. And I had to step mother, real sob story. And already I sounded like a real tough kid from Warsaw. So he bought it. I don't think he would denounce me anyway. I don't think you would.

I didn't realize that there were already partisan bands around that time, around that--

--area.

--place. And I-- there were people coming in sometimes with those peasants, especially-- there was one young man from Warsaw, I think. He was always hanging around that farm, and I was afraid of him.

And I slept in the barn, and I don't know if somebody denounced me or if he just smelled a Jew. He raped me. It happened many times. I had no place where to run.

And maybe a week or two later, a forester came. He was a volksdeutsche, an ethnic German, and he said, well, I came to take-- my name by the time was Krystyna. I went by my middle name. Irena Krystyna were my documents, but by the name Krystyna, Krysia.

I came to take her because somebody said that she's Jewish. And my peasant-- and that farmer said, no way. I would kill her myself with a pitchfork. We've been praying together. She's going to confession. She's not a Jew. I would-- And he said, well, I don't think she is, but I have to pick up some other Jews. We got some other Jews around here, and I have to bring her to the station.

And that young hoodlum, he said, I'm going, too. And we were in the forest, going toward the station, police station, and there were a few other Jews. I'm sure they were Jews. And apparently, he was also involved with the partisans, and that guy was a good friend of his, that forester.

And became sort of like-- all of a sudden-- I still don't remember how it happened because it happened so fast-- there was a struggle. And he said to me, just beat it. You're on your own. Scram. He saved my life. And I didn't feel at that time. I felt wet. And of course he knifed me, that forester. I still have that big scar here.

Who said "beat it"? The young man?

The young man.

Get out of here?

Yeah, just on your own, scram. Beat it.

We have to change tapes.

What?

And--

I'd like to change the tape.

Want me to stop? Maybe I should--

We just have to change the tape.

Sure.