

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Poland During the 1930's and World War II

Personal Experience

O.H. 1027

WANDA UTKOWSKA

Interviewed

by

Paul Merz

on

October 23, 1981

WANDA UTKOWSKA

Wanda Utkowska was born in Sajoly, Poland in 1926. She has vivid memories of Poland before Nazi occupation, the occupation itself, and of Germany during the war. She also spent four years in an American camp for displaced persons before emigrating to the United States in 1949.

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INTERVIEWEE: WANDA UTKOWSKA

INTERVIEWER: Paul Merz

SUBJECT: the Nazi invasion of Poland, Germany during
the war, American camp for displaced persons
Jews, slave labor, refugee camps

DATE: October 23, 1981

M: This is an interview with Wanda Utkowska for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program regarding her experiences in Europe prior to World War II, by Paul Merz, at her home on Metz Road, in Columbiana County, on October 23, 1981, at about 3:30 in the afternoon.

Wanda, could you tell me about your childhood and where you were born and when?

U: I was born in a little city in Poland. The name of it is Kazaniv.

M: That is in Western Poland?

U: Right. I was raised very poor. My dad died and left four kids. The people raised us. I never knew my family very much.

M: Was your mother alive?

U: My mother was alive.

M: But she didn't keep you four children?

U: No, she couldn't. We weren't orphaned.

M: Okay, she couldn't keep you.

U: She couldn't keep us. My grandmother raised my older sister. We other three, my two brothers and I, had to go to people's houses.

M: So your older sister went to live with your grandmother?

U: Yes.

M: And you and your two brothers were put out in like foster homes. Other people took you.

U: Yes, like a friend or whatever. They kept us. I never stayed close to my mother or brothers to know each other. We were just raised. We don't know each other.

M: You were born in 1926?

U: Yes.

M: When did that happen?

U: Dad died when I was six years old.

M: So he died [in] about 1932?

U: Something like that, yes.

M: So about 1932, you went out to live with. . . .

U: With the people, yes. Then, those people raised me until I was about 12 years old.

M: For about six years you were with them.

U: [For] six years. Before the war started, I went into the city. I lived with a family another time.

M: That was up until 1938 that you lived with those people?

U: Yes.

M: Were they nice to you?

U: Very nice. I had to work.

M: You had to work for them.

U: Very hard.

M: What kind of work did you do?

U: Everything. I had to clean the house, sometimes cook, sometimes wash the clothes, plant the garden, cut the wood by hand like old-fashioned, with a handsaw.

M: A two-hand saw like that?

U: Yes, two-hand saw. I had to milk the cows, too. I had to milk three cows at that time in Europe.

M: So they lived in the country?

U: They lived in the city. We had a small farm. When I was 12 years old, I went to the city before I went to Germany.

M: Did you stay with those same people?

U: Before I came to Germany?

M: Yes. Did they move from the country to the city?

U: No. I was with different people. I was with those people for six years, and those other people were different.

M: They were country people.

U: They were country people. I moved in with some city people.

M: Then in 1938, you went with city people?

U: Yes.

M: You were 12 years old.

U: Yes. Then in 1938, I lived in the city a couple of years before I went to Germany. I saw so many things in the city that I would have never understood.

M: From 1938 until 1940, you were in the city of Poland?

U: Yes. I saw so many things at that time. Then at that time, Germany came into that city.

M: While you were in that city, the Germans came in?

U: Yes, they came in. They mostly came in the morning. I never could believe why people born in Germany did harm to people. We were hurt very bad, and we were scared to death when they came.

M: You got up one morning, and they were there.

U: They were there. We never knew when they would come.

M: You had no warning?

U: No. We got up and saw the city surrounded.

M: Did you have a radio?

U: No, we didn't have any radio. Once a week we would have a paper, maybe.

M: You knew there was a war going on.

U: Yes, we did. You could see a soldier coming in and stuff making problems.

M: You would see an occasional German soldier.

U: Yes, right. Mostly they came in, surrounded the city, and started catching people. It was mostly men.

M: Okay, they were taking men who lived in the city?

U: Men in the city. It was between Polish people and Jewish people.

M: They were looking for Polish men and Jews?

U: And Jews.

M: Jews being men, women and children?

U: Mostly for Jews both men and women, but with ours they were just taking men. The Polish people taken were just men. When they catch you, they cover your eyes, take you into the woods, and tell you to dig the holes. People didn't know for what that they were digging the hole [for]. When they were done digging the hole, half of the people had to die. For every 100 people maybe, half of those 100 would die. You are digging your own hole for death. The ones who had their eyes covered were going to die. Those digging the hole were going to go home. I don't know why they do that.

M: Okay, so the ones who actually dug the hole didn't get shot?

U: They go.

M: They let them go?

U: Yes.

M: But they killed other people.

U: They killed those with the covered eyes. They don't see what they are doing. Those people fall into the hole.

M: In the ditch.

U: Yes.

M: Did you see that happen?

U: Yes, we saw. Our friend went there, too, when he was caught. He dug a hole, so he came home.

M: He dug a ditch?

U: Yes. In the woods, maybe one mile from us.

M: From where you lived.

U: Yes. When they were done with their job, the people were killed. Some people could go and look where they were shot. When they were shot, they were covered with just a little ground. The ground was shaking because some people were still. . . .

M: Still alive?

U: They still could have been alive.

M: You saw that with your own eyes.

U: Yes. We saw when they shot you in the head, all of your brain hanging in the tree forever. I saw that, too. That day we were very scared. All the city people were shaking.

M: You were 14 years old?

U: I was 14. I didn't know much. When I saw a Jewish guy get shot in our yard while I was working there, then I started thinking something was wrong.

M: Right in the yard where you lived.

U: Yes, he wanted to go into the city. They started the starvation already for the Jews, so they didn't have enough to eat. They wanted to go in the morning to some place to a farm or something.

M: He was trying to get out of the city?

U: Yes.

M: And they shot him right in your yard?

U: Yes. He came around. The Gestapo or whatever they called it. . . . They were covered up. All you saw was the face. You didn't see the eyes or anything.

M: Great big hats.

U: Yes, big hats. They scared you to death when you looked at them. When I saw that Jew had been shot in the yard, then I started thinking something was wrong some place. Why were they shooting people? When they were shooting, we would go and see a brain hanging in a tree and the ground was shaking and noise. . . . When they started shooting, you heard the noise. When you see a Jew shot in your yard, then you get scared.

M: It made you afraid.

U: It made me afraid; it made me scared.

M: What happened to his body?

U: When I saw that he was shot, he was shot right; he was still alive. He started shaking himself and started picking himself up trying to get up. The German already left some place. Well, somebody came in and told him that the Jew still had not died. The German came again and shot once more. Then, the Jew died. With the body, I think he laid there for one hour. After that, the family came and picked him up. I did not see them bury him. I had been told that.

M: The family came and got him.

U: Yes, they just took his body.

M: How about the people who were buried alive who were wounded? Did anyone try to help anyone like that?

U: No.

M: You didn't help?

U: No, people were afraid. Before they started taking the people who were to be shot into the woods, they told you that when people started to do any problems, the whole village would be burned and that the family would be shot; so we weren't to try to do anything. People didn't have any guns, so people couldn't fight there. People were scared very bad. When they saw them coming in, everybody was scared sitting in the house.

M: Just stay away from them.

U: Stay away from them. They didn't want to see them at all. When you were walking in the street and you were

looking for some problems, you were going to be shot. So people were afraid. I really still can understand why people were afraid.

M: Well, the fact that they had the guns and you didn't.

U: Yes, and we didn't. You are right. One morning, I get up myself from the barn and I saw a dog starting to dig a hole. I started walking and saw hair from human people. I pulled my hand, and I said, "My God, what is that?" I pulled hair. There was a Jewish lady shot. They were looking for her and couldn't find her, but then found her there shot and buried. I don't know. Maybe people did know. I didn't.

M: You had a neighbor who was a Jew.

U: Yes.

M: And you found her grave beside your barn?

U: Yes, yes, and I told these people for who I was working that somebody was buried and the dog dug the hole to pull her. Those people told me to go into the house and not to say anything. That was what they told me.

M: Pretend like it didn't happen.

U: Pretend like I didn't see anything. I saw so many things that you just can't believe it. Then maybe a week later, a few people were coming down. They started on this farm. I don't know how they found the Jewish lady with the baby on that farm. They put her in a horse and buggy and brought her to town where I had been working and took her into the woods and were supposed to shoot her and the baby. The baby may have been a year old. We know about those two people, too.

M: You must have lived real close at the time.

U: We did. The Jew lived inside, and we lived outside.

M: They actually lived right in the city?

U: Yes, in the city, and we lived outside. It was mostly Jewish people who had the stores.

M: They had the stores in the city?

U: Yes.

M: But the woman with the baby lived on a farm.

U: No, she ran away. She wanted maybe to hide and save her life.

M: Go and hide.

U: Yes.

M: But they caught her and brought her back.

U: They caught her and brought her. I saw that, too. When they brought her to stand for 10 minutes maybe, and she was standing with that baby. . . . It felt like we were looking in a window. It felt like she nursed the baby.

M: Oh yes, she nursed the baby.

U: Nursed the baby. She held it tight to her. One German came and another one shot her, I think. I did not see him shooting. I saw somebody else shoot. He stood for maybe 10 minutes beside her, and then he left her. Then another soldier came and shot her. She died there. They ordered people not to pick up the body or anything.

M: What about the baby?

U: The baby was shot, too.

M: Shot them both.

U: Both together. This first guy from what I understood. . . .

M: He couldn't do it.

U: For so many years, even he couldn't do it.

M: He couldn't do it.

U: The second one did it. He was still at her side, and he pushed him aside.

M: He pushed the first one out of the way and shot them?

U: Yes, the second one.

M: You saw that with your own eyes?

U: Yes, I did. That was a village lady from ours.

M: Did they do it in front of people? Did they want you to see?

U: They told you not to look and not to make problems. People still tried to go in the barn or wherever to try to see what was going to be happening. That was what

we had seen then. People were still closer than we had been and told us what had happened. This was what we had seen. A lady came and cleaned these people's house where I was working. She was even closer. She wasn't very far away like we live here, now.

M: She saw what happened?

U: She saw very good. Then she told us. We saw it a little bit further out. She told us though, because she was very close to see what happened. That is the story from what I saw. After that, they started taking people very heavily to Germany. No matter where they catch you, they caught you and kept you some place. Then, they would catch more and more. Mostly they caught people on a Sunday morning going to church or wherever.

M: When you went out to church, they would catch you.

U: Yes, they were catching people. They mostly wanted young generation. I don't know.

M: They wanted younger people.

U: They wanted younger people like 12, 11, 10, young kids. They did not catch mostly older folks. It was just young. It was like that when I was caught.

M: You were 14 or so.

U: Yes, I was 14. They kept us until they got more people. Then later on, horses and buggies would come and soldiers would come, too, and take you to the big city, to Czestochowa.

M: Were just Poles gathered up like that?

U: Mostly Polish people. When I left, there were no mixed people.

M: No Jews?

U: No Jews. Jews had already been started in a different direction.

M: They were capturing them and sending them off into a different direction.

U: Off in a different direction. They did not mix with us. They mixed us in Tarnowskie Gory, a big city. Then from there, they shipped you to Germany.

M: They shipped you first to. . . . What was the name of that city?

U: Czestochowa.

M: Along with Jews?

U: No, [we were] separate.

M: Separate, but you all went to that city?

U: Yes.

M: You were just kept separate from the Jews.

U: Yes, from the Jews.

M: From there, you went to Germany.

U: Yes.

M: Where did the Jews go?

U: There are so many things--you know how cows go. I don't know how to explain, but there are so many things. Jews go separate, and we go separate.

M: Did you go on different trains?

U: Yes, when I went to Germany, we went on different trains.

M: Jews went on one train, and Poles got on another train.

U: Yes, it was a separation made from us. I don't know what they did with the Jews there. When I was there, they dropped you like pigs and cows. We didn't have a cement floor or anything. It was just dirt.

M: When you got to Germany. . . ?

U: No, Czestochowa.

M: When you were waiting to go to Germany. . . ?

U: Yes. We waited for a night there. The next day, we were supposed to take a shower. They took our clothes, everything.

M: Men, women and children?

U: Everything. It was all mixed up. There were old people too, and little kids. I, myself was 14. There were 10 year-old kids there.

M: From your village, they tended to take young people?

U: yes.

M: When you got to the city, they had everybody.

U: Everybody was brought there, old and young together. I think they brought the Jews there, too. We saw everything. When they took your clothes, they let you go to shower in a house. I don't know how far it was. We would have to walk with no clothes.

M: Naked.

U: Naked. You were scared when you saw all kind of people. I was scared to death when I saw people.

M: You were still only 14?

U: Yes, I was 14. I saw old people naked and young people. Just sometimes, you would have to close your eyes and pass. It scared you. It was very dirty there. Then, when we were done showering, they brought our clothes back. They were so hot.

M: The same clothes?

U: Same clothes. They took them to put some medicine on them so that they weren't diseased.

M: Do you mean they might have washed them?

U: They were hot. When they gave us them, they stunk and were very hot.

M: They stunk like something. They must have sprayed them with something.

U: Could be. They were very stinky clothes that they gave us. We wore them. We waited for one more night in Czestochowa. Then, we went to Germany by train. It was at night, mostly.

M: Okay, so you left Poland on a train for Germany at night? What year was it? Was it still 1940?

U: This was still the same year. It was in the spring time, I think, in May. It started getting warm.

M: How did they tell the Jews from the non-Jews?

U: They marked them.

M: But how did they know how to mark them? How did they know you weren't Jewish?

U: I don't know how they knew.

M: Were there people there to tell them, like your neighbors?

U: No, they knew somehow. Jews told them. I found out later when I came to Germany that they told them and gathered them all together so that they could be shipped to their country.

M: Their own country?

U: Yes, and Jews thought that was how it was going to be. They were all put together and put in a train and shipped them to their own country. Then, they thought they were safe.

M: They tricked them?

U: They tricked them.

M: That was one way they did it.

U: Yes. After a while, what happened, we didn't know. There were so many gates. They pushed us at one gate; the Jew had been marked as a different gate. Young people were at a different gate, and I still wanted to go to this gate. I don't know what would happen if I went to that gate. I could be dead. I didn't know. Some lady pushed me.

M: You were lined up at one gate, and some lady pushed you off to another gate.

U: Yes, another gate.

M: You have often wondered what would have happened to you if you would have gone through that gate.

U: I wonder what would have happened to me if I would have gone through that gate. I still think of that and I am 56 years old. I still think what would have happened if I would have gone through that second gate.

M: You still think of that?

U: She pushed me to the third gate.

M: From the gates, you went different ways?

U: Yes.

M: You got on different trains.

U: Yes, we were on different trains.

M: So if you would have gone through that other gate, you would have gotten on a different train.

U: Yes.

M: Who knows where you would have gone.

U: Who knows where we would have been. I heard people talking one day. They said that the Jews were going to do heavy work. If the Polish people were good, they were going to take us to the easy work. They were going to give us a better life. That just wasn't true.

M: They lied to you.

U: Yes.

M: How did they mark the Jews?

U: They made a star, a big star.

M: Right on their arm?

U: On their arm.

M: In their skin?

U: No, on the clothes when they were sewing.

M: On their clothes?

U: It was when they were sewing.

M: What color was the star?

U: I think [it was] yellow. I didn't know for sure. It was yellow so that they could see you far away. I think they were yellow. Maybe I'm wrong. It has been so many years. You still could see it far away. We were marked "P" for Polack.

M: For Polack.

U: Yes. Then they knew who you were because of the "P." They were ready to ship us to Germany. They put us on a train, and I did not see Jewish people on our train.

M: You saw all "P's."

U: Just all "P," yes. We went on that train. That train didn't have any seats. It was like a cow's train.

M: Okay, cattle cars.

U: Yes.

M: You didn't have seats or anything like that?

U: No, we didn't have seats. We were just pushed in and we went. They told us not to try anything. Soldiers were on the train everywhere you looked. You just couldn't do anything. They would shoot you right there. We went at nighttime. I don't know how long it took us, but we arrived in the morning at Germany.

M: You left Poland at night?

U: At night.

M: Were you in the Germany the next morning?

U: The next morning. I don't know how long it took us. We were sleeping. We arrived in the morning. I could see where we were. Everybody was talking, saying that we were in Germany. I think we arrived in Berlin in Germany.

M: Into Berlin.

U: Yes. From Berlin, they took us to Nuremberg.

M: Nuremberg.

U: Yes.

M: That is in Southern Germany.

U: Yes. There they dropped us off and put us all in a line and told us to sit. We did not eat all night. We sat until almost dinner time. They gave us coffee in paper cups and a piece of bread.

M: Coffee and bread.

U: [A] piece of bread, yes. Then they told us to wait again. They pushed us to the floor and told us to sit. They were cold people to come and take us away. When we were sitting there and waiting, the German people would come and just look at us.

M: Now, were they soldiers?

U: No, just civilians.

M: Just civilians.

U: We saw soldiers all around us.

M: All around you.

U: City people would come and talk to the German people. We didn't know what they were saying.

M: To the German soldiers.

U: Yes.

M: How many were in your group?

U: When I was shipped to Nuremberg, I bet you we had 100, or over 100 people.

M: One hundred to 150?

U: Yes, they were shipped to the city.

M: Okay, you all are sitting along there in a straight line.

U: Yes, all around and waiting. I didn't know for what we were waiting at that time. Now, I know.

M: Then, you didn't know.

U: No. People were coming starting to pick the people. A person went over to the kid sitting in the corner and picked him up. A lady came and took my arm and told me to get up. She pushed me, and I got up. Then, she took me on a train. I don't know how many people were picked. I left everybody. Just three people were picked.

M: You were one of the first picked.

U: Yes. She picked me up, and we went. We went on a train again to her house. From Nuremberg, we went to her house. It was 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I was really hungry and thirsty. She still didn't give me anything to eat when she brought me to her house. She took me in a field and showed me that I had to work.

M: You couldn't understand her and she couldn't understand you.

U: No.

M: She showed you what she wanted you to do.

U: She showed me everything.

M: You hadn't been fed yet?

U: No, I had not been fed.

M: How long has it been since you left Poland?

U: Well, I think 24 years. It went to almost the next day at dinner time, at 3 o'clock.

M: So it was like two days.

U: Yes, it was two days that we were not fed by people. When I got to her house, she still did not feed me. She just told me to go work. I went to work. She showed me what I could have and what I could hoe. I was already in the country. I knew what carrots and beets were. She still did not trust me to leave me by myself when I worked.

M: She had you working with carrots and beets?

U: Carrots and beets, yes. She would wait and watch me. Supper came, and she still did not feed me. She told me, "Barn." She showed me the barn and we went into the barn. I had to milk the cows first. I had to milk 14 cows that time on the first day.

M: For her you milked 14 cows?

U: Yes. She came and gave me a bucket. I milked the cows. I was so hungry. There were so many cows standing in the way. I took the bucket and started drinking milk. I was so hungry. I was done with the milk, then. Then, there was supper. Supper was very poor. We had juice, potatoes, and a piece of bread. It was skim milk. It is not as good.

M: Potatoes, bread, and skim milk.

U: And skim milk, we had for supper.

M: They didn't eat that?

U: No, they were just given meat. One Russian guy was working with me there. He had already been there before me.

M: There was already a Russian working there when you got there.

U: Yes, there had already been a Russian guy there when I got there.

M: Did this woman have a husband around her?

U: No, her husband went in the war.

M: Oh, he was a German soldier.

U: He was a German soldier fighting Polacks. She had a brother and a sister with her and then, there was her.

M: So there were three of them and you and this Russian.

U: Yes, there were five people, I think, all together. They never ate with us for maybe six months, with the Russian guy and me. Then after a while, we started eating with them.

M: Where would you eat?

U: They had a kitchen and a small kitchen beside her kitchen.

M: Okay, they would eat in the kitchen, and you would eat in a little room off of the kitchen.

U: Yes, they had a kitchen and a barn and a house together. German people never had a separate barn.

M: I never knew that.

U: Yes, they had one roof. They had cows on the one side, and they slept upstairs. Then, the kitchen and living room or whatever was on the other side. You didn't have to go outside in the wintertime to feed the cows.

M: They were under the same roof?

U: Yes, summer, winter, or whenever, the cow is under the same roof. They never are outside, the German cows. You have to go and cut the clover; you have to go and cut the wheat or whatever for inside. The German cow had never been outside. We slept upstairs and ate together with the cows.

M: Together.

U: Yes. It wasn't nice. I worked very hard. This Russian guy ran away from there. I was left by myself. I started to run away, too, and they got me.

M: They caught you?

U: They caught me and brought me back.

M: How far did you get?

U: Not far away.

M: Farther away than Neuwatufeur?

U: Could be.

M: About that far.

U: That far away in the woods.

M: About two miles.

U: Two miles. I slept in the woods.

M: Where were you going to run to?

U: I wanted to run to some place in the city to get help. I didn't know better. This guy ran away, so I decided to run away, too.

M: Did you talk to him at all? Could you understand each other?

U: Yes, we talked. We understood each other. He told me that when he was going to run away if they didn't catch him for a couple of days, that I could try it, too. Well, they didn't catch him. They did not bring him back. I ran away.

M: Did you ever see him again?

U: No.

M: Never saw him again?

U: No, never saw him again. I don't know what happened. I never saw him again. I ran away. They brought me back to her. There was a Polish guy working next door. I started talking Polish to him, telling him how she treated me. She didn't treat me nice. She did not feed me right. She just wanted work. This Polish man knew German. He talked to his boss, and his boss went to the city to speak for me to come and work for him. When I changed places, I liked that place very much.

M: He went to the city and talked to somebody about getting you moved from where you were at to the next farm?

U: Yes, to the next one.

M: Why do you suppose he would do that?

U: I think he saw that I worked hard and was very young, and that this lady didn't treat me right. They looked like they were different people over there.

M: Better people?

U: Better people. Very good, they treated me very good.

M: This was when, in 1941?

U: Yes, 1941.

M: Somewhere in there.

U: Yes, I worked for him just for one year. I liked it very much. They treated me very good. We ate together. The kids were good. They never called me Polish swine or anything. They never called me this. They were very good.

M: How old was he?

U: He was older. They did not take him into the Army. He was sick. He must have been 50 or 55, something like that.

M: He was too old for the Army.

U: Yes. He stayed home. I liked it very much there. You could hear the bombs flying every place.

M: This was 1943 by now?

U: 1943.

M: You could hear the bombs?

U: You could hear the bombs. A couple of bombs were dropped one day. They did not blow up. They just fell.

M: Did you see them laying there?

U: Yes. The ground was so soft.

M: They went right into the ground?

U: They just went into the ground. They didn't blow up. Cows broke a chain and ran away.

M: It frightened them.

U: It just frightened them, yes.

M: What city were you close to when you lived there?

U: Nuremberg.

M: You were close to Nuremberg?

U: Yes, that was the big city nearby. Nuremberg is very, very big.

M: That woman picked you up in Nuremberg, and you took a train. You must have not gone too far.

U: Not far away. If we had dinner at 4 o'clock, then we would leave around 2 o'clock. It wasn't that far away.

M: We were talking about the bombs.

U: Right, we could hear the bombs. We knew there was something going on. We knew something was very bad. We did not hear anything. We did not hear people talk.

M: You did not have a radio?

U: We didn't have a radio to find out if it was very bad some place.

M: The guy who you worked for, did he have a radio?

U: They had a radio. When we worked in the field, we listened. Then when we came to dinner, it was shut off.

M: It had been shut off.

U: When we came in for dinner to eat, everything was quiet.

M: You could talk to them, then.

U: I only understood a little bit of German.

M: You were learning German.

U: I could talk.

M: The man who worked there with you was also Polish, and he spoke German?

U: He spoke German very good already. When I didn't know how to say something, he would help me.

M: And you were there for one year?

U: One year. One morning at 2 o'clock in the night, a couple of German soldiers came. I was really scared at that time. I thought they were coming to pick me up. They might have been coming just to talk to these people. I didn't know. This lady came and woke me up and brought me into the living room. I saw a couple of soldiers standing there and two girls with them.

M: Two girls?

U: Two girls and a couple of soldiers. I thought maybe they were picking somebody or something and they wanted me and they were going to shoot me. I was scared to death. I couldn't move. I was scared so bad, she took me upstairs and told me not to be scared. The next day, I saw the soldier clothes brought upstairs. They must have change clothes, I think, and then left. I never saw those German soldiers again.

M: They left their uniforms there.

U: Yes, and then put them in the farmer's empty room. They were left there. From what I understood, they changed their clothes and took off. They did not bother me. They just wanted to scare me. After that, we knew something was wrong some place when they dropped their soldier clothes.

M: They were getting out of their uniforms.

U: Yes, and we knew something was wrong some place. You could tell. After that, the big city started saying, "The war is finished; the war is finished." I still didn't believe it in the country. We didn't know it that the war was finished.

M: In 1943, the bombs were falling from the air. It was just about that time that you left those people.

U: Yes. I worked at the second farm for almost one year before 1945.

M: So you were still on that farm when the war ended?

U: Yes, we were working there still for three months after the war was over.

M: You were only there for a year?

U: Yes.

M: Then you must have been with that woman for a couple of years.

U: A couple of years, yes.

M: It must have been until 1943 or something.

U: Yes. I worked for the second one for just one year.

M: A little over a year.

U: Yes. After that, they told us that we had to get ready and that the Americans were going to make camps for us.

M: How did you know the war ended?

U: Well, we knew, but they were very nice, and they asked us to stay.

M: Who?

U: The German people. They were very changing and very good.

M: They changed just like that?

U: They changed just like that.

M: Did they tell you the war was over?

U: Yes, and they told us that the American people wanted us to get ready to leave the people and that they were going to take us to camps. We started packing. I didn't have much, just one dress and one pair of shoes, maybe. We packed and got into the horses and buggies and they took us into the big city.

M: The people who you worked for took you to the city.

U: Yes. They made big camps. From there, I went to Nuremberg again.

M: Okay, from there you went to Nuremberg. How did you get to Nuremberg, by train?

U: We went on train. They took us to the train in a buggy. We went on a train then, to Nuremberg.

M: Tell me what you thought when you realized the war was over.

U: I didn't think much. Everybody was happy and dancing in the street and drinking. They started robbing everybody.

M: These were the Germans?

U: No, Polish people started robbing the banks. There weren't any banks any place. They just bombed. Everything was bombed. All homes were laying on the ground. There were no homes.

M: Everything was destroyed?

U: Everything was destroyed in Nuremberg.

M: You saw Nuremberg right after the war.

U: Yes, after the war. I was scared to death. There were no homes.

M: There was nothing left?

U: Nothing was left. There were just a few homes maybe from Nuremberg. Everything was just destroyed. You are very scared when you see something like that. They started camps.

M: Were you frightened when you were there?

U: Yes, I was. I was scared very bad. We trusted the American soldiers as soon as we saw them. They are very different people in Germany.

M: You saw your first American when you got to Nuremberg?

U: Yes.

M: Up until then, you hadn't seen any Americans?

U: No.

M: Was the camp right in Nuremberg?

U: Yes, they took over the German soldier. . . .

M: Barracks.

U: Yes, they put the refugee there.

M: How many refugees were you with?

U: Oh God, [there were] thousands and thousands.

M: Thousands and thousands?

U: Thousands and thousands!

M: Just Polish people?

U: Everyone.

M: Germans?

U: Not Germans, just Polish, Italian, French. . . .

M: Were there Jews?

U: I saw a few Jews, but not too many. I think there were just a few Jews among the Polish people. We wondered what they were going to do with us, then. They brought us there. They dropped us off. We were hungry, and they told us to wait.

M: Who told you, the Americans?

U: Americans, yes. They told us to wait. They were getting blankets and getting us something to eat and whatever. It was about two days before we got something to eat. There were so many people that they didn't know what to do with them. We got soldiers' blankets; we got soldiers' beds. I don't know where they came from.

M: Like cots?

U: Something like that. There were all kinds of people there, too. I saw lots of different kinds of people, all young kids and everything. After that, they told us that we could go back to Poland. They were going to ship us back to Poland.

M: How long were you there in that camp?

U: I was six months in that camp.

M: So it was getting close to 1946.

U: Yes, and I did not want to go back to Poland.

M: Were the Americans nice to you?

U: Yes, the Americans were very nice. They thought of ways to make hospitals for us. The United States sent clothes and shoes or whatever. They gave us help. The Germans didn't want to help us, though. They just told us to go home.

M: Back to Poland.

U: Yes, back to Poland. The Americans helped us. The Americans were very beautiful. They started helping us. They started giving us groceries. They didn't give us much, but they. . . .

M: Gave you what they had.

U: [They gave us] what they had. They fed us anyhow.

M: And they told you that they were going to send you back to Poland.

U: No, they told us whoever wanted to go, [could go].

M: Who wanted to go back to Poland?

U: Yes. They told us who wanted to. They told us to be ready and wait for the train, and then we could go.

M: Did many go?

U: Many went.

M: Many went back to Poland.

U: Many went. My brother was some place in Germany, too, and he went back to Poland. I never knew where he had been or seen him.

M: He went back?

U: He went back.

M: Is your brother still alive?

U: No, he is dead. It is almost seven years now. He had cancer.

M: Did they tell you that you could go back to Poland or you could go back to the United States? Did they tell you that at the same time?

U: No, they just told us we could stay in Germany.

M: So you thought you were going to stay in Germany.

U: Yes.

M: That was still better than Poland.

U: Better than Poland, yes.

M: You didn't want to go back to Poland?

U: No, I did not have anybody to go back [to].

M: You thought you were better off in Germany?

U: Yes.

M: By that time, you were just about 20 years old.

U: Yes. After that, they started taking people to the United States. They told us that the United States, Canada, and Belgium had been opened for the refugees.

M: How long did you have to wait to get that invitation?

U: Very long.

M: What year [was it]?

U: I waited, I think, until 1949 or 1950.

M: So you were in that camp for about three years?

U: We were in there longer than that.

M: Four years?

U: From 1945 until 1950.

M: Five years.

U: Yes, we were there waiting until the United States told us. I was supposed to go to Australia.

M: Australia?

U: Yes, I did decide [to go to] the United States.

M: You had a choice?

U: I had a choice to pick. I didn't want to go to Australia.

M: Were you one of the last ones to get out of the camp?

U: No, there were many people still left when I left.

M: That was in 1950.

U: Yes. There were still lots of Polish people, Latin people, Russian people. There still were plenty of them left there. I don't know what happened to those people there.

M: Why did you choose the United States?

U: I don't know. I liked it better. The people came, the soldiers came and told us about their beautiful country.

M: How did you understand them?

U: Some of them were Polish.

M: Some of the soldiers were Polish?

U: Yes, from Polish families. They would talk to us and help us to understand them. That way, we could find out. The German and Polish soldiers were mixed. Sometimes you couldn't understand the Germans.

M: In other words, in America you didn't know who you were talking to. It could have been anybody.

U: Right, you could see their faces.

M: You could sort of tell.

U: Yes, you could tell that they were very friendly. You could see that look not to be afraid. Well, I decided to come to the United States, and here I am.

M: Tell me a little bit about that. Did you come over in a boat?

U: We came in a boat. They treated us pretty good. It was an Army big boat.

M: How big of an Army boat?

U: [A] big Army boat. I came to New York. We were in New York for one day. They fed us while we were there.

M: They fed you.

U: I think the church helped find you a job. Some people already had a place to go. You would come, and they would take you. You would come on a train.

M: Did you have someone waiting for you?

U: No, I didn't.

M: Did you have a job?

U: No, I didn't.

M: What did you do?

U: We went to New York. The church found a job for you. You had to wait so long for them to try to find a job for you. I couldn't have a job, for I had been married and I had to wait for my husband to come behind me.

M: Okay, you were married in Europe.

U: Yes, and he came five months later. I waited for him for five months so that we could be together. When we got together, we didn't get along good. He had not been nice to me. I was pregnant with my daughter.

M: When did you get married?

U: I was married in 1946.

M: In the camp?

U: In the camp.

M: In with the Americans in Nuremberg?

U: Yes, the camp. We had a church there. We had nearly everything. We got married. Most of the people just got married in a court and not in the church.

M: You got married in 1946.

U: Yes.

M: When you came over, why didn't they send you and your husband together?

U: They didn't have a visa for two people. They mostly wanted the single people.

M: Did you lie to them and tell them you were single?

U: Yes, I did.

M: How did you know your husband was coming?

U: He already started his papers. If I didn't think he was going to come, I was going to help him. When you are here, it is easier. You could get somebody and help you to bring him. I only had a very few papers. I just had to wait for the visa to come.

M: So you knew he was coming shortly?

U: Yes, I knew he was coming. When he came, we left from here together. He got a job working in Hoboken, New Jersey.

M: Hoboken, New Jersey.

U: Yes, in a hospital, some place he got a job. They found him work right away.

M: What did you do for five months while you were waiting for him?

U: Not much. I was just waiting. People were helping and churches--mostly churches were helping.

M: You didn't work at all?

U: No, I was pregnant with my daughter. I did not work. I lived with him for one year. We didn't get along good. I ran away from New York and came to Ohio. Here I am.

M: How did you get here from New York?

U: I ran away.

M: You didn't walk?

U: No, I got on a train.

M: Did you have money to buy a ticket?

U: I stole my husband's money.

M: You stole money from your husband?

U: Yes, he got his pay and put it on the table. I bought the ticket. A German family lived beside me and she helped me.

M: That was in New York.

U: Yes, she helped take me to the station to get to Ohio. That is the true story.

M: Can you think of anything else you want to say?

U: No, that is all I think. During the war when I was there, I just couldn't believe it.

M: Your brother survived. How about your sister?

U: My sister survived, and my brother survived. My one brother was dead. A German shot him.

M: You had two brothers.

U: Two brothers, yes.

M: And one sister?

U: One sister, yes. One morning, a German Gestapo came and started catching people. He caught two people and put them in the woods and shot them. We never knew where he was shot, where he was buried. I don't think they were buried. Then, I went to Germany. When my niece came to the United States, she told me the story that he had never been buried.

M: They found him?

U: They did not find him. It was just the Polish people in the village who were talking how they just left you when you were shot.

M: So out of four of you, your brother was killed and the other three made it through the war?

U: Yes.

M: What happened to your mother?

U: My mother died in 1942, I think, before I went to Germany.

M: During the war.

U: My grandmother died, too. I didn't have anybody to go back to.

M: That was why you didn't want to go back to Poland.

U: Yes, I had nobody to live with. I just decided to stay in Germany. I decided to stay in Germany. From Germany, I decided to go some place after that. I picked the United States. I think that was a good thing. I am glad I live here.

M: Yes, you and me both. Thanks a lot.

U: You are welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW