HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

KLARA LEIZEROWSKI

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Josey G. Fisher
Date: May 4, 1981

Holocaust Oral History Archive
Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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KL - Klara Leizerowski[1] [interviewee]
JF - Josey G. Fisher [interviewer]
Date: May 4, 1981

Tape one, side one:

[Long pause before start of tape]

JF: This is now an interview with Mrs. Leizerowski, whose maiden name was Klara Felker, done on May 4, 1981 by Josey Fisher. Can you tell us where and when you were born, and a little about your family?

KL: I was born in a town, Chovorow is the name. C-H-O-V-O-R-O-W. It was Galicia. It was a town near Lemberg. Lemberg is a famous city. And you want the date, too?

JF: If you can give it to me.

KL: Twenty-eight of October, 1924. I was one of three children. I have two younger sisters. They are both a year or two younger than me. Do you want to know the background of my parents?

JF: Yes, could you tell me that?

KL: My father was a merchant.

JF: What did he sell?

KL: Yard goods. He had a large warehouse. We attended school in the same city.

JF: What kind of school did you attend?

KL: I attended public school for seven years. Then I had four years of *gymnasium* they called it. Two years of *lyceum*, like here is college two years. And then I went to study pharmacy in Lemberg. I didn't finish it because in the meanwhile the war broke out in 1939.

JF: During your school years, in the public school, what kind of experience did you have with the non-Jews in the community?

KL: We always had the strong feeling that we are Jewish, and we stuck to it. We lived in a neighborhood, fairly Jewish neighborhood. We had a lot of gentile friends. But, we felt this antisemitism strongly.

JF: Where did you feel the antisemitism?

KL: We felt it all over. We felt it in school. We felt it in business.

JF: In school…

KL: Yes.

JF: Was this coming from the teachers, or from some of the other children?

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[1]née Felker.

KL: It came from all over. The teachers were inclined to that and this influenced the students and we felt it.

UI: Is Isaac here?

KL: He went upstairs [unclear].

JF: You said that you did have some non-Jewish friends though?

KL: Yeah. You had to because we went to a mixed school. It was nothing like a segregated school. It consisted of Gentiles, a lot of Gentiles, and a small percentage of Jewish students.

JF: Was the number of Jews in the school restricted?

KL: Not in the public school and not in the high school. But, if you wanted to enter, like, a professional field, it was.

JF: What about your Jewish education? How religious was your family? And what kind of experience…

KL: My family was not Hasidic. I mean, my grandparents were Hasidim, but my parents were like, you can name them middle class, also in religion. My father, of course, prayed every day and went to *shul*. And we had the Sabbath. We had *kashrut*.

JF: You kept *kashrut*?

KL: Oh yes, no question about it, strictly observant. It was one of the basics.

JF: But you were not Hasidic?

KL: My father was not a Hasid. My mother was from the other side, inclined to *Hasidim*. So we were like in a division, faced in a division between *Hasidim* and between *Mitnagdim*, like they say. I myself, I am also inclined to *Hasidim*. In fact, I was last week in New York and I went straight to Shabbat services to the *Rebbe*. So, I am very comfortable and …

JF: As a girl, at that time, what kind of education, Jewish education, did you have?

KL: We went to Hebrew school, a basic Hebrew school, which taught us reading, writing, *davening*, and all the customs.

JF: How many times a week was that?

KL: This was about four, five times a week, in the afternoon. We have it here, Sunday school. Equal to Sunday school but on a more, what can I say, on a broader level. And then, I myself, because we did not have boys, and you know the desire for mothers to have, Jewish mothers to have a boy, and I was the oldest of the children, so they sent me to a higher school. For *Chumash* and *Rashi* and, so, I have this Hebrew education. I spoke a nice Hebrew. In fact, I gave some small lectures in Hebrew with the audiences. You know, like a mother wants to show off her girl.

JF: What kind of audiences were you speaking to?

KL: We had only, of course, Hebrew speaking audience. Our city was the same as was the intelligentsia. So, we had the Jews in our city were very intelligent. In those times, they spoke French. I, myself had French and German. No, French not,

excuse me. I had German and I had Latin and Polish and Ukrainian, which is a part of Russia. Even today, I can speak [unclear].

JF: Now, the war years occurred when you were fairly young. You were still in your teens. How did this affect your life? When do you remember changes occurring?

KL: Oh, at the outbreak of the World War II.

JF: Before the actual start of the war, during the '30s, after Hitler got into power, do you remember any…

KL: It was already after the outbreak of the war.

JF: Do you remember any kind of changes in your town preceding the war?

KL: Yeah, sure. We had the largest people who emigrated from Germany, in those times.

JF: Who came to your town?

KL: As refugees.

JF: These were Germans or Poles?

KL: No, Jewish. Jewish-German.

JF: That is what I mean. They were German Jews.

KL: They were German Jews. They came, and they told us stories about closing the factories, and about confiscating their material goods. And some of them came with their keys in their hands. But, I guess we did not face the reality then. We could not understand that such a thing could happen. So, we considered them either sick people, or something must have been wrong, we thought with them, because how could you do such a thing? But as the war draw closer, we realized that something is coming.

JF: Did anybody try to leave, or think that you should try to get out at that point?

KL: Yeah. We, when the war broke out in 1939, we were occupied by the Russian army, until 1941, from '39 to '41, about two years. So, as the Germans came closer to our city, some of our people, only a few, escaped, with the Russians.

JF: Now, during the time that the Russians occupied your city, were you given a choice as to whether or not to accept Soviet citizenship?

KL: No. I, myself, our family was in a very unfortunate situation, because my father was considered a rich man, and as a capitalist, we did not have the right to get Russian citizenship. They considered us, you know, like outcasts because they thought that we oppressed the working class. So, we got this passport number 13, which was only for people who were wealthy. And we did not have a chance.

JF: What did that passport mean?

KL: This passport meant that you are officially marked as an enemy to the Soviet Union because you did not belong to the working class.

JF: And what did that mean as far as what happened?

KL: It meant danger, period. They could come in the evening, during the night, and they could take you away with your whole family and *shlep* you to Siberia,

which they did to a lot of our friends. So, we had a very bad experience during those years, '39 to '41. In fact, we didn't sleep at home many nights, because we were afraid that some evening they will come to take us. So, in 1941, when the Russians …

JF: Before we get to that, excuse me, was your father able to continue to work during that time?

KL: No.

JF: The business was confiscated?

KL: They confiscated it. They took some of our furnishings. They took away some movable things, like beautiful curtains or silver. The people even from our town, Jewish people came, working people, and they took it. And you had just to stand by and not to say one word. They said, "Mr. Felker, now it is over. Now we are taking. We are on top." So, we thought this is probably the worst that could happen to us.

JF: Was there any way that you could have left at that point?

KL: Oh, yes. Yes.

JF: And how would that have been?

KL: We could, I mean, first of all, they could take us away. We could manage to escape to a different town, which would not make any difference to us if the Germans would occupy us. But, I think now, that we would have been very lucky if we were taken away to Siberia, at that time. It was considered the most horrible thing, but at least, one or two of us would have survived.

JF: I see. When had the laws started changing, as far as your behavior?

KL: They did not change.

JF: The laws had never changed?

KL: As longs as we were under that occupation, it did not change.

JF: You were not restricted in your…

KL: No. The Bolsheviks, they don't, how do you say? They don't compromise.

JF: You were able to continue with your religious practice during those years?

KL: Yes, yes.

JF: The synagogue was allowed to stay?

KL: Yes, yes, yes, yes. We had *kashrut*. We had Shabbat. We had synagogues. We had services. Everything was like before.

JF: What was the attitude of the Russians who were in charge of your town?

KL: The attitude of the Russians. It's hard to say. They were like, very friendly to the working classes and very opposed to the people, to Americans, to professionals, to so-called rich people.

JF: You were continuing your education still at this time?

KL: Yes. It was hard.

JF: Is this when you were in pharmaceutical school?

KL: Yes, yes. I was at that time in Lemberg, in Lvov, a bigger city.

JF: Living apart from your parents?

KL: And there was plenty of money. I used to go and come. It was only like an hour distance by train.

JF: Then, you were living at home at that point and commuting?

KL: I lived a few days in the big city and then I came for the weekends home.

JF: And then what happened?

KL: And then, in 1941, at the end of the summer, the German army was approaching. And my mother considered of escaping, with the Russians, even if it was so bad. She was deep down afraid of the German army, of the Germans, because she, she was afraid. But it's hard to leave your house and to leave your family and my father wasn't eager to do that and we was teenagers. So we decided to stay and wait what will happen to other people, the same will happen to us. And we stayed until the Germans occupied our city.

JF: Which was in what year?

KL: It was in 1941.

JF: About what month, do you remember?

KL: Yes, sure. It was May, June, end of July.

JF: And what happened when they occupied your city?

KL: And when they occupied our city, of course, the trouble started.

JF: Can you describe it?

KL: It wasn't so bad in the beginning. They were shouting at us, and calling us names, like *Jude* [unclear]. We started to wear these armbands with the Star of David on our left arms. Our daily groceries and supplies, surplus started to get meager and meager. We felt it all over.

JF: Were you able to continue with your schooling after the Germans invaded?

KL: No, no.

JF: That was the end.

KL: Nobody could thing of anything.

JF: What were you living on during those couple of years?

KL: You mean during the Russian occupation?

JF: During the Russian occupation.

KL: Like I said before, my parents were very rich people. And for us, it was not a problem. We had jewelry. We had a lot of gold and a lot of silver for us to sell something and to live on the money. It didn't mean nothing. So, this wasn't really the problem. The problem now was how to save our lives. But even so, we did not think of the things that happened later.

JF: Did you think at that point of trying to escape?

KL: No, there was nothing.

JF: Once the Germans were in your town?

KL: No. Where could you escape? You escape to another little town, to a bigger town? It happened, it was like a pogrom. It happened all over. It was a plan, which was very manipulated and calculated until the last minute. It was like hidden. Nobody could know.

JF: What happened then to your family?

KL: They started to make these actions. They call it *Aktionen* [Ger: police raid, campaign]. It means like they had a day from the morning, eight o'clock, until the evening eight o'clock, like twelve hours. They gave the military an order, to shot anybody who is Jewish, who they want, young or old, no difference.

JF: This was happened on the street?

KL: On the street. In the houses. On the cemeteries. It was awful. It hurt me so much, because I heard this German, this Nazi what's his name? Brand [unclear]. He was talking on the radio two weeks ago, about that the Holocaust did not happen at all. And I heard this interview. And they asked him what happened to the people. Like my husband was in Auschwitz. They saw hundreds of people, thousands, taken to the crematorium and we never saw them. So, he had the guts to tell the audience that they escaped some of them, probably taken to Russia, to Palestine. I just banged that radio and I had to shut it off because I couldn't take it anymore. You see, it did not happen only to Jewish people. It happened to 10,000,000 people. And so many eyewitnesses. And I am sure that everybody knew what happened to us.

JF: Did you see the Germans shooting people?

KL: I heard. I didn't see, because I was hidden. How could I see? I wouldn't be today sitting near you.

JF: Where were you hidden?

KL: I was hidden mostly by Christian families. I, myself, and my two sisters were hidden by a priest in our city, with his wife, whose daughter was a friend of mine in school. In the beginning only.

JF: Now, where were your parents?

KL: My parents were hidden in a big basement, divided into small parts. They were hidden in our house. We had a beautiful house. The one part was covered like this board, nicely painted. You pulled out like a few of these boards. You went in. You covered it again from the inside. Invisible, do you say?

JF: Had they built this hiding place?

KL: Of course.

JF: Before the Germans?

KL: No.

JF: When the Germans entered the city?

KL: Yes. When we saw it is not good. And we heard what happened in the other cities. Then we started to think what to do, because we figured that it is only going

to take like periods of the shooting. We didn't know that it was going to be permanently now.

JF: So, they were hidden in a very small space behind these boards?

KL: Yeah. About 10 people, I think. Our neighbors too.

JF: And they were able to take food there with them?

KL: Who thought about food then? Believe me, nobody thought about food.

JF: And they were able to place you with your friend's family?

KL: Yeah. And then, after it got quiet, during the night, we heard that our parents are alive because we sent a boy who was a servant at the priest's house. And he went to our parents. And we demanded that they write us a letter in their handwriting, so we would know. We recognized the handwriting of my father and mother. So, he brought this back, and of course, we started to cry, all three of us.

JF: This was the first?

KL: This was a few times, as I remember. In 1941, 1940-41. No, 1941 started the war. It was 'til 1942, about December, 1942. It is hard for me to remember the dates. I said before to the Rabbi, it would be a good idea just to write down the dates, whatever we can remember still now.

JF: Yes, as well as you can remember now.

KL: 1942, December, that's when my actually stay in that city finished.

JF: Now, during that time, were you with your sisters in hiding?

KL: No, I was, like I said before, in this priest's house.

JF: Yes.

KL: It wasn't a house. It was like a barn, you know. We went upstairs to the barn. You had a lot of vegetables there. What do you call it? Hay.

JF: The loft of the barn? The upper story of the barn?

KL: Upper story. And then they took away the ladder. But we heard shooting and screaming, because it was near a cemetery. Screaming and shooting and yelling. And then it quieted down.

JF: And how long were you able to stay in this place?

KL: We stayed until the next day, until the morning. In the morning we went home. You can imagine.

JF: What happened?

KL: Corpses all over the city.

JF: And what did your family decide to do at that point?

KL At that point, we didn't know what to do. We thought of plans, but unfortunately, the Gentiles didn't help us. On the opposite, because they knew, the Germans were not acquainted with the living quarters of the Jewish people. But the Gentiles knew, the friends, the neighbors. So whatever they couldn't find out, the other ones showed them. Even if it sounds, you cannot be polite, you have to tell the truth.

JF: You mean, certain of the …

Tape one, side two:

JF: Could you explain that to me please?

KL: What was the question? Did others help us?

JF: The Poles, in what way were they able to help you?

KL: They say in Hebrew, *Hayotze min haklal* [Exception to the rule], which means, one of a million, one of thousands helped you. And I don't know how big this help was. But personally, they helped me.

JF: Who helped you?

KL: There was a family, a gentile family, which consisted of a husband, wife, and two children, small children, two boys, four and nine years old. And I, myself, did not look Jewish. I had blond hair, braids, blue eyes. I spoke nice, a very nice Polish. So, for them to hide me, or to take me away, would not be such a big danger, like to take away a dark-looking girl, with black eyes, with a big Jewish accent. So, once they made like a joke, to my mother, that they could hide me.

JF: This was before the occupation?

KL: No, it was during the occupation. Those hard days when the shootings already started.

JF: During the occupation.

KL: So, my mother of course said, "I would be very grateful if you do that for my child." So, they decided to take me away.

JF: So, you were separated at this point from your parents?

KL: In 1942, December.

JF: From your parents and from your sisters.

KL: Yeah. I never saw them again.

JF: Where had you been during that year and a half? You had been with the priest, in the priest's home for…

KL: No, I wasn't in the… I was only for a night.

JF: And the rest of the time, you were living…

KL: With my parents, with my sisters, in my home.

JF: In your home.

KL: But later on, they started to gather the Jewish population into a special section, which was called ghetto.

JF: This was when?

KL: In 1942.

JF: When you were living in your own home, with your parents and your sisters, you were not approached anymore in your home, by the Germans soldiers?

KL: Of course we did.

JF: And they didn't…

KL: Of course we were.

JF: And what happened.

KL: Each time was the same story. Shooting, robbing, shooting, looting. The shooting was the danger. The looting and robbing was not the danger.

JF: Did you try to hide in the basement, in this hiding place, at that time?

KL: Yeah.

JF: I see.

KL: They encircled the ghetto. They have us a special section.

JF: This was in '42. In which month?

KL: About beginning of December. My parents had to move out from their house and move into a very small room with other families.

JF: With your sisters.

KL: With my sisters, with my uncles, with my aunts, with my cousins, with my neighbors, crammed into one house, about 40, 50 people.

JF: Now, were you there before you left, in this ghetto?

KL: Yes, I was only one night.

JF: Only one night, I see.

KL: I was only one night. Everybody was tired and slept, and I couldn't. And my father always said that I am the one who has to be saved, because I will not be able to take it because I was very heartbroken. Right away, I, I don't have this *koach* [Heb: strength], the strength to fight. Right away, I get so weak and helpless and hopeless. I don't care what happens to me, at that point.

JF: There was no way to hide your sisters. So at this point, the family that your parents knew…

KL: At this point, my family stayed with the two other children, and with the rest, and I was taken with this gentile family.

JF: You said you never saw your family again.

KL: No.

JF: Do you have any idea what happened to them?

KL: Sure. My family was shot, in the same city, in 1942. I confuse the dates, you know? Because the war broke out in 1939. We were occupied until 1940.

JF: Until the Germans came in? You had said July of 1941.

KL: 1941. And I left in 1942, December. So my parents were shot on February, 1943. I am confused with 1942 and 1943. I have to ask my friends, 1942 or 1943. It was the 13th of February.

JF: That your parents were shot?

KL: Yeah. Six days in Adar in the Jewish calendar. My parents brought a truck, a little truck. Of course, everything was secretly done. And they were supposed to escape with other friends and with the rest of the family, my uncle, my aunt, to a bigger city. Stryj they call it. Also in Galicia. It was like an hour or maybe an hour and a half from our town. And probably, the man who sold them was a spy and he let the Germans

know. And while they were already in the truck, they came and they took them away to a prison. It was on a Tuesday. I was now in the yard so we were talking together about it. They took them away on a Tuesday. They stayed in the prison Tuesday night, Wednesday, Wednesday night and Thursday morning around ten or eleven o'clock they took them all to a forest in our city. And they had to get undress, completely naked. It was cold, so cold, and the wind and the frost, like in Eastern Europe. And they were shot. I have all in one grave. Oy, I will have a day today. You just made me think…

JF: How did you hear about this?

KL: From gentile friends. Friends, friends telling friends, and they told me.

JF: During the time that you had left with the family, did you have contact with your family that was still in the ghetto?

KL: Yeah. I got some letters once in [unclear] I got some letters. The gentile family who took me to another city, and kept me in their house. I was hidden under a closet. You know, in Europe, we used to have these closets where you put in your clothes, not like these folding door closets. But they had closets, like you open the door.

JF: You mean the piece of furniture?

KL: A piece of furniture. You put in your things and you close it again.

JF: Like a wardrobe?

KL: Yes, this would be in a corner. And it made the other side of a triangle. The corner becomes a triangle.

JF: Behind the piece of furniture.

KL: And I was sitting behind the closet. *Szafa*, they call it in Polish, *Szafa*.

JF: *Szafa* is the name for the piece of furniture.

KL: Yeah.

JF: What town were you hidden in?

KL: I was in Lemberg.

JF: In Lemberg.

KL: And then they have to run away with me, from Lemberg, to a smaller city, because it became very hot. The people started -- the Germans started to look in each house. And they examined mostly each room. So, it became very dangerous for me to stay. So, they took me away to a smaller city. It is very complicated.

JF: What was the name of the city that they took you to?

KL: It was a small city near our town, called Pomyoyanta, Psary, a small town, like village town.

JF: P-S-A-R-Y was the name?

KL: P-S-A-R-Y, Psary.

JF: This was also near Lemberg?

KL: It was near Lysik.

JF: I see. And where did they live there?

KL: They lived there, they had like an apartment. He was a cashier of the train station. So they got an apartment on the top of the train station. And this lady, she was not Polish. She was a born Czech lady, from Prague. He was Polish. I would consider her better than him, emotionally. You know, more sensitive and more ready to do a favor. Actually, she was the one who inspired him and the children to save me. She was the one who suffered with me.

JF: Now, when you were in this small village, did they have to hide you in that apartment as well?

KL: They had to hide me because, it's very hard to explain. They had to hide me because, you see, they had this military occupation of each little station and big station, and they called it *Wehrmacht, Militarishe Wehrmacht* [Ger: Army, Military Army]. So, I was in constant danger. And I had to sit behind the *Szafa*. And I had a little stool that I was sitting and even in July, I was so cold. I had to wear like a warm housecoat and warm socks, because if you don't have -- if you don't move around, you feel cold.

JF: What did you do for all those hours, sitting behind the wardrobe?

KL: Nothing, I don't know. I really don't know. I probably was made of iron because I couldn't even read. It was dark, you know, like darkish. And then I didn't have the desire even to read. I was sitting and waiting, just sitting and thinking and dreaming. I knew already that my family is not alive anymore.

JF: You heard that right away?

KL: No, no. About six weeks passed. These people didn't want to tell me. But after a while I demanded some news from them. So they started to cry. I said, "Tell me the truth." So they started to cry. So I knew right away what happened. So I was left by myself. No family whatsoever, no money, no nothing. Only on the mercy of these people.

JF: How long were you in this village?

KL: I was there for about, I think two and a half years.

JF: In the same village.

KL: In the same village. Not in the same village. I was in that village, and then it became very dangerous there, and they had to take me back to the same city. They still had their villa, their house, where they lived in our city. So, they had to take me to their house because it was very dangerous, in that little town Psary. So the question arouse, how to take me? Everybody knew me. Every little cat, the cats, the dog even would recognize me. So it was very complicated. And it was in May, in May I think.

JF: May of what year?

KL: May, May 19 [long pause] 1944, probably. It would be May, 1944. They took me back to the city, by train. But, in order to come to our city, we had to go around to a few other cities. Do you understand?

JF: On the train.

KL: On the train, in the evening. And we came to that city, miraculously. I really escaped recognition.

JF: Did you try to disguise yourself in any way?

KL: Yeah. You mean, just change my appearance? Of course. Of course, of course. I put down my braids in a different hair-do. I put some lipstick, which I never wore. I put some more mature clothes on and high heels and an overcoat. Yes. But even so, it was very dangerous. And there it was the same situation. I was sitting under a closet. And here even it was worse, because the front with the Russians started to get closer and closer. And they did not trust the Poles with the overseeing the passages from a city to a city. So they put in like *Wehrmacht* they call it. *Militarishe Wehrmacht*, like before. And they confiscated the room, in that family's house where I was staying. Do you understand?

JF: The *Wehrmacht* confiscated a room for the Germans' use?

KL: Yes, for four Germans. So you can imagine that I was in one room, which I don't know how I did, and they were in the next room divided only by a door, which was not closed. It was, but it could not be locked, because locking a door had meant some secrets and they could not afford that.

JF: How was the family able to get you food?

KL: Terrible. Ya, like I said before, I was sitting under the *Szafa.* They gave me the food from under the *Szafa*, you know, in a little plate. And I was sitting under, on a little bench, little, like you know, sometimes you have these foot bench, that little. And unfortunately, I couldn't go to the bathroom even. I couldn't get out during the day, so I had a little problem.

JF: Could you get out at night to sleep?

KL: Yes, I did. At night they moved away the *Szafa*. I went out and I laid down. And I slept five, six hours.

JF: In that room?

KL: In that room and the family too.

JF: The family was also sleeping in this room?

KL: Yes. And then early in the morning, they moved it back.

JF: And the Germans were sleeping in the next room?

KL: The next room but they never came in. Never. They did not disturb us. But once, it was like during the afternoon I came out because my feet -- in fact, I have still a blood clot in my left leg, from sitting under the *Szafa*, like a big, big blood clot formed. So, I did not feel comfortable and she took me out a little bit. She was under the impression that he is on that station, train station. And he knocked on the door and he came in. He wanted some milk in the kitchen. He wanted something. And she said, "Yes, of course." Mr. Beck was his name. "Of course you can." And he went in and he took some milk and left. And then, this is the time when we got very scared. And we

decided we must do something. I cannot stay anymore in that house. And we decided to move me back to that little town. It was only a half hour away from our city, back to Psary, back to that apartment.

JF: With the whole family?

KL: The whole family moved with me. They didn't have any choice.

JF: Were they able to leave without suspicion?

KL: Yeah. But I couldn't go by train. I could not afford to come out. So I walked by foot.

JF: You walked? By yourself?

KL: No, with this Gentile and with her. Early in the morning, we got up. It was about maybe five or six weeks, maybe two months, before liberation.

JF: Their children were with you also?

KL: No. The children stayed with grandmother. Sure, they were in the same house. We had to teach the children, in case somebody asks them about who is staying with you. They should say, "Father, Mother, my brother and me." And they asked him, "Who else?" But the little boy was only four years old, and later, he was five years old, and he could not understand. So they taught him, "You cannot say." They called me Maria, you know, Marisha. "You cannot say that she is here." He said, "Why, Mamusha, why Mamma?" She said, "Because the Germans, they want to take away her. This is your [unclear]. This is -- they want to take away her. So don't say that anybody is in our house except us."

JF: How old were these boys, at this time?

KL: When I came, they were five, four and five, four and nine. Excuse me, four and nine. And later, this one was ten, and this one was five, and this one was six and this eleven.

JF: And they held their tongues?

KL: Yeah. Miracles, miracles.

JF: Were you able to get any kind of information during those years in hiding, about what was going on outside of your town?

KL: Oh, yes, sure.

JF: You knew about the death camps?

KL: I knew everything. I knew about the death camps. I knew about that our city was liquidated. *Judenfrei*, no Jews was living anymore. I knew what happened to other people who escaped from our town. I mean, practically everything was empty of Jewish population. Unless some people were in hiding that we didn't know about.

JF: Were people able to escape from your town successfully?

KL: From our town, we had about 10,000, maybe with suburbans. We are today alive, we were alive after the war, 17 people.

JF: 17?

KL: 17. 1-7, 17. That's it. [Long pause.] So, any problem that seems so big for other people, shouldn't be [laughing].

JF: You can't compare it. Tell me about that walk, back to your small village.

KL: This was a terrible walk. This was like a death march. After months sitting and hiding, we had to get up early in the morning, five o'clock, four o'clock. Get dressed. We said our prayers.

JF: You were able to say your prayers, your own prayers?

KL: Of course. That sustained me. And we walked. It was hard. Many times I just laid down on these tracks and I said, "I can't do it anymore." My legs are really so stiff. I couldn't walk. But, she said, "You must, you must, you must, you must." And from far, we had already bridges. We saw the German military with these big binoculars, looking for spies, you know.

JF: Were you stopped on this walk by soldiers?

KL: Yes, I was stopped once with them.

JF: Did you have any kind of false papers with you?

KL: No, I didn't. I had a passport from a -- that I made, a false -- for 1942, and this was already 1944.

JF: So you had a false passport that was two years old.

KL: Yes. I didn't take it with me. It was not of any use.

JF: What did they do when they stopped you?

KL: They stopped us and they said, "Who are you?" So I didn't answer at all. But this gentleman took out his identification card that he is the main cashier of that train station in Psary. And he didn't ask about the -- but he talked in German. And my lady that I stayed with, she spoke nice German. In Prague, they spoke German, so she knew it. And I pretended I don't know. And they said to us, in German, to me, "*Im sommer badet man hier*," what we had a little lake, you know, near by. And he said, "In summertime you can bathe here," to us, "Isn't it nice?" And I was laughing. You know, to yourself. I was laughing. And thank God. And then when we passed that guard and it was a nice few yards, we didn't see them. I just laid down on the tracks and I said, "I am not going. I don't care what is going to be. Let the train come and do what they want. I cannot walk." But, she kept pushing me, you know, talking to me, "You know what we did to you. You endangered our lives. And it is so close already to the liberation. And actually, you are the only one left of your family, and you are going to do that to us? Please stop that. You be hysterical when we come home. You can do that, but not now. Just keep going." And when we came already home, it was like an hour's walk or maybe longer than that. My feet were so swollen. And this lady came in with her husband and they couldn't believe that I am alive. They, she kept my hand. And she fell on that floor and she cried hysterically. She was in her thirties and she had stripes of gray hair.

JF: Which? Who are you talking about now, which?

KL: The lady who saved my life. The family, the mother of these two children.

JF: The people who walked with you. When you walked into the apartment in Psary, at that point, she started crying.

KL: She was so hysterical. Yes, it was too much for her. The strain was so big, she had to keep on going 'til that…

JF: And that's when she …

KL: Stopped, and she could cry.

JF: Yes. You said she had gotten gray stripes in her hair from the strain.

KL: Yeah, she was an angel.

JF: So you stayed there again behind the wardrobe?

KL: We stayed there again in a few weeks. And the front kept coming nearer and nearer, closer and closer. And we ran away to that little village. You know, from the train station to the village. But, it was not any more danger, because they were themselves so confused, the Germans, with the running away, that they did not look for any more Jews.

JF: And you felt…

KL: And then the first thing we saw was a Russian soldier, who came in, as a forefronter.

JF: This was a couple weeks after you had been there…

KL: This was 1944.

JF: In 1944.

KL: In 1944. Fall 1944.

JF: So, a couple of weeks after you arrived back in this town, a Russian soldier…

KL: Yeah -- not a few -- like a few weeks -- we had like a still war zone.

JF: Were you still in hiding then, again?

KL: Sure. Sure, 'til the last minute.

JF: And then what happened when the Russians came?

KL: And then when the Russians came, of course, we were crying and screaming and laughing. Unfortunately, the first solider that I saw, a Russian, was an officer. And we came closer to him and we said, "Oh, we are so happy to see you. At least we can breathe now." I didn't say that I was Jewish. And then I said, "Hitler and the German army, they shoot everybody." I said, "Everybody, and the Jewish, especially." So he said to me, "You *Yevrei*? Jewish? I don't mind," he said in Russian. "This is a nation that does not want to work but to eat." You can imagine, after so many years, to hear that. It was horrible.

JF: This is a nation who does not want to work.

KL: Yeah. [Unclear]. Russian. It was awful. It was just awful.

JF: And then what happened?

KL: And then we were under Russian occupation.

JF: What was that like?

KL: You know, especially, I, on the one hand, we were glad that we got rid of the Germans. But on the other hand, we started to make plans to go away.

JF: You and the family.

KL: Yeah. No family. I did not have any family.

JF: No, the family that you were living with, I mean.

KL: Yeah, the family, the family. Later on, I separated from them. I went to live with Jewish people, with the sister, who also miraculously escaped. And then I went back to, this was Eastern Europe. And we left the Germans. We left the Russians. And we came to Western Europe, Katowice, and there, we had already about us H.I.A.S and the Joint. And we started to make plans of leaving Europe completely. I, myself, I had an uncle in Switzerland who was the Chief Rabbi in Switzerland [unclear]. So, I had this privilege of having it easier, because my uncle arranged for me to come to Switzerland. So I came to Switzerland. And I stayed there for about two, two and a half years. I can't remember exactly how long, until 19-- yes, sure, I remember, 1946 'til 1949. This was when I got married to Rabbi Leizerowski. We got to know each other and I went to Germany with him.

JF: And you had your first two children.

KL: I had my first two children in 1950 and 1952. I had them in Munich, Germany, where my husband was a Rabbi. And in 1952, in May, we came here. May 5, 1952, we came here.

JF: And your other children?

KL: My other two children were born here. My daughter and my youngest son were born here.

JF: In what years?

KL: My youngest daughter was born, let's see, if she is now 25, so when was she born? She was born, probably, 1956. And my little one was born in 1967. He is 14.

JF: Is there anything else you want to add?

KL: Well, I wish to live now in a country free of every fear, and to be sure that -- well -- and I hope that this is not going to be repeated for never.

JF: Thank you very much, Mrs. Leizerowski.

KL: You're welcome.