

Apolonia Starzec



That's me in the 1940s. The photo was taken in Warsaw. After my mother's funeral I returned to Warsaw. I still lived with the Bergers, they had two little babies. There was a basement in the house, and during the relocation action carried out daily between July and September 1942 you could go down there. The Germans entered the ghetto and told everyone to gather in the courtyards, assisted by the police. They didn't go up the stairs because they were afraid of typhus which at the time was rampant in the ghetto. We, acting on intuition, either went down to the basement or not. Grandmother Berger, for instance, climbed into the mezzanine with the children. The entrance to the basement was hidden, children were the first to go. You had to crawl into the shelter which, until the alert was called off, remained bolted shut. And I remember to this day what gave me the horrors then: that I'm in a dungeon and I cannot leave it through that small exit. And the conditions in that basement were horrible. The crying children? My sister and I went through many such alerts. And the transports kept going until the very end. The last transport during our stay in the ghetto took place when few people had been left. We had realized by then that no one would stay in the ghetto. We had to leave. Highest time. My sister hesitated, she was afraid to go, was all nervous, her face reflected fear and anxiety. We worked in the so-called shop, a furrier's

shop on Nowolipie. We made fur coats for the military, for the German army in Russia. The so called Schultz shop. We had the 'Ausweise'; that was supposed to help us survive. And, indeed, it did. During yet another action they told us to take food for three days and clothing. And so we went. A procession, like in the movie, it was terrible, people had taken whatever they could with themselves, now they fell under the burden of all those bundles. We didn't have much, just a change of underwear and that's all. People left everything along the road until they got to the Umschlagplatz. And there was a whole campsite. With fires, tents? And so the selection and segregation began. We had to go into the line, with those 'Ausweise' of ours. You showed your papers and you went either this way or that way. We saw some friends, acquaintances. There was a girl we knew, with her parents, relatively young ones, and her husband. Our friends, neighbors. And, before our very eyes, the parents were taken to the side, i.e. to the transport, and the young ones were let through, because they had 'Ausweise,' like us, so they were still useful, fit to work. In front of me there was a woman with a little baby. That's cruel, but I'll never forget it either. Because they let her through, but only without the baby. And she left the baby because she wanted to go through. Humans ceased to be humans. All ethical principles and human feelings had been suspended. It was a traumatic experience for me. That was the kind of scenes I saw. I was together with my sister, but we were young, had the papers, and they let us through. And so we returned to the apartment at Nowolipie. We met Grandmother Berger there, she had hidden with the children? the whole family had stayed.