

Jeff and Toby Herr Collection
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Skiepkko, Janina
Polish Witness to the Holocaust
Polski
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Summary

The interview is made with Mrs. Janina Skiepkko, born 30.08.1921, who as a child witnessed the crime towards Jews in the small town **Narewka** [Bielorussian: **Нараўка/Narauka**]. She remembers some of the Jews known to her and talks about the daily life during the time of German occupation.

Tape 1

[01:] 00: 39: 16 - [01:] 04: 18: 13
00: 32 – 04:14

Mrs. Skiepkko talks about her family: They were four children (2 brothers, 2 sisters). One of the brothers was killed being 17 years old. Her parents had a butcher's shop and a beer cellar.

[01:] 04: 18: 13 - [01:] 10: 43: 00
04: 14 – 10: 54

Mrs. Skiepkko talks about Jews who were living in Narewka before the war. She tells, that the street (first Próżańska street, afterwards 11. Listopada street) she lived at and is still living at was a street where many Jews lived. Her neighbours were:

[Szamaryl?] Ryszalewski	– small shop
Medyn	– dye- works
Woloszycki	
Rajbrod	– tailor
Honosanicki	

In Narewka existed also a Jewish trade with meat (besides the butcher's shop of her father and the butcher's shop of the brother of her father), but there were no competition, because the Jews did not trade with pork. There also was a Jewish candy- shop. Mrs. Skiepkko tells that some Jews worked at her fathers building site to earn money for the departure to Palestine.

[01:] 10: 43: 00 – [01:] 22: 17: 20
10: 54 – 22: 58

Mrs. Skiepkko remembers the first planes flying [„messerszmity”, Messerschmitt] over the city and the reaction of her father after telling him about the arrival of the German troops to Narewka. She talks about the existence of a camp in the near town **Gruszki** during the time of the Russian occupation and the harassment of the **NKWD** [Narodny Kommissariat Wnutrennich Del, Народный комиссариат внутренних дел] of Mrs. **Hackiel**, Jew who possessed a glasswork (firm) (and a mill?).

[01:] 22: 17: 20 – [01:] 34: 44: 17
22: 58 – 35: 56

Mrs. Skiepmo talks about the fate of Jews during the time of the German occupation. On the 15.08. (year?) she went to the church and saw male Jews and older boys kneeling in front of it. While the service was held the Jews were killed near the catholic cemetery, because they weren't in front of the church anymore, when she was coming out of it. She heard that one of the Jews, Mr. **Warsztacki**, pharmacy owner, tried to escape. Jewish women and children were kept at the fire station; in the evening they were brought to **Hubryniek** (?).

Tape 2

[02:] 00: 43: 24 – [02:] 06: 18: 03
00: 37 – 06: 25

Mrs. Skiepmo remembers that during the German occupation a closing time/ curfew was introduced which lasted from 08:00 p.m. till 06.00 a.m. She mentions a Pole **Józef [Joseph] Wyśniewski**, who Germanized his name into **Wiesner**, and patrolled the streets together with a dog and was beating everyone, who was outside during this period of the day. She mentions also **Michał Sakowski**, who cooperated with the Germans. She talks about polish local collaborationists, but can not remember the details.

[02:] 06: 18: 03 - [02:] 30: 08: 24
06: 25 – 31: 16

Mrs. Skiepmo talks about the mayor **Stanisław Solowiej**, who together with the Germans managed the property of the killed Jews and who gave her family one of the Jewish houses to live in. She saw locals digging in the gardens and backyards looking for buried possessions. In the end she answers questions concerning some details of the events she talked earlier about.

[02:] 30: 08: 24 – [02:] 33: 28: 15
31: 16 – 34: 44

In the end Mrs. Skiepmo shows a picture and mentions names of tree Jewish girls:

[?] **Satyr/ Sader**
[Madzia/ Magda ?] **Szurmeister [Schurmeister]**
[Wielowa/ Wilowa ?] **Schmitt [Schmidt]**

More detailed

[01:] 10: 43: 00 – [01:] 22: 17: 20

10: 54 – 22: 58

Mrs. Skiepkó remembers the first planes flying [„messerszmity”, Messerschmitt] over the city and the reaction of her father after telling him about the arrival of the German troops to Narewka. She talks about the existence of a camp in the near town **Gruski** during the time of the Russian occupation and the harassment of the **NKWD** [Narodny Kommissariat Wnutrennich Del, Народный комиссариат внутренних дел] of Mrs. **Hackiel**, Jew who possessed a glasswork (firm) (and a mill?).

For example, what was her father's reaction? What does she say about the camp? What kind of harassment of the NKWD?

- Reaction of her father: one morning her father came and said:
 - “Children, it's very bad”.
 - “What happened?”
 - “war”
 - “what is ‘war’?”
 - “The Germans attacked Poland.”
- Reaction of her father, after telling him of the arrival of German troops in Narewka:
 - “father, father. Some troops came, I think Germans.”
 - Her father's arms hang down – “silence, don't shout! Behave yourself. Don't jump/hop.”
 - He went to look, “Yes, these are Germans.”
- Camp near Gruski
 - 1941 many Russian troops lived in Gruski
 - After the war broke out, the Russians left and the natives went there to look for leftovers
 - The camp consisted of wooden huts and dugouts
 - Many soldiers committed suicide, because of the horrible conditions (mosquitoes)
 - Plenty of dried fish

- Harassments of the NKWD

- in general the Jews lived unharmed during the Russian occupation
- the NKWD kept watching everybody
- Mrs. Hackiel was the only one who welcomed the Russian warmly, her son [Abraham] worked in Moscow (Mrs. Skiepmo later calls him a communist)
- The NKWD persecuted Mrs. Hackiel (traced her)
- first kind of oppression I can't understand, because she is speaking very unclear (it has something to do with her glasswork, they didn't allowed her to manage the glasswork anymore (?), I'm really not sure)
- Mrs. Skiepmo tells that she can't remember what Mrs. Hackiel did further, Mrs. Hackiel might still worked there (at the glasswork)
- Mrs. Skiepmo answers that Mrs. Hackiel did not survive the war (later on she tells, that she don't know, what happens to her)
- Mrs. Hackiel lost the glassworks, because she couldn't pay the mortgage back to some man who lend her money (because of the outbreak of war) and he had the right to take the glasswork from her (later, in 1947/ 58, Mrs. Skiepmo brought the glasswork from him)

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22: 58 – 35: 56

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For example, How does she know the Jews were killed? How did Mr. Warsztacki escape?
How does she know the women and children were brought to Hubryniek?

- how does she know the Jews were killed?

- while walking to the church she met a redhead German (soldier) who called her “Fräulein” (unmarried woman), she answers that she is already a “Frau” (married)
- he took his white gloves off and showed her his calluses on his hands, she asked what’s that, he answered that he beat up some Jews, she responded “schade” (what a pity), he asked her if she really pities Jews, she responded that “of course, they are Mensch (humans)”
- she saw the kneeling Jews, she went into the church, she didn’t hear when they were taken away, because the service was held during that time and she was too scared to look out of the window, when she came out the Jews were gone, she tells that the Jews were brought to the cemetery and were beaten (but she doesn’t tell if she saw this), she tells that one handicapped man wasn’t fast enough and was shot down (she heard it from others)
- she tells that it was a very quick execution, Polish locals had to bury them
- they were telling her, that one [Mr. Warsztacki] tried to escape (and escaped?), she didn’t see, she tells that she doesn’t know (this part is a little bit confusing)
- she tells about the women and children in the fire station and tells she was passing it, but didn’t go near, because Germans were standing next to the building (she only tells that they were brought to Hubryniek, but didn’t mention if she saw it, or how they were brought there)
- the Germans who took the Jews were no regular troops, but a formation of many SS-men (neatly dressed, grey- blue or grey- green uniforms), she doesn’t know, how they came to Narewka (maybe with cars)
- afterwards Mrs. Skiepmo tells that they were looking for some Jews who might be still in Narewka, but there was only silence in the streets, suddenly she heard a shot (they shot a Polish “robber” who was in a Jewish house and took 1kg of sugar, she saw the corpse), she looked in the direction and saw some Germans running out of the house of the redhead (armed with shovels)
- she had to translate, that everyone who the Germans will catch in a Jewish house will be beaten, the Jewish property is our German property
- the German killed a non- Jewish and deaf- mute elderly woman [Marianka] (she was a servant in the house of the Jew) lying in a bed (due to illness), because she didn’t went out of the house when all the Jews were taken (they mistook her for a Jew)

Tape 2

[02:] 00: 43: 24 – [02:] 06: 18: 03

00: 37 – 06: 25

Mrs. Skiepmo remembers that during the German occupation a closing time/ curfew was introduced which lasted from 08:00 p.m. till 06.00 a.m. She mentions a Pole **Józef [Joseph] Wyśniewski**, who Germanized his name into **Wiesner**, and patrolled the streets together with a dog and was beating everyone, who was outside during this period of the day. She mentions also **Michał Sakowski**, who cooperated with the Germans. She talks about polish local collaborationists, but can not remember the details.

[For example, How did Mr. Sakowski cooperate? What does she say about the local collaborators?](#)

Mr. Sakowski

- was somehow connected to her husband (distant family ties), he was looking for bacon for the Germans
 - Mrs. Skiepmo tells that she had many pigs, her husband opened the enclosure and let them out, and after Mr. Sakowski came he looked on the traces left by the pigs and told them that at this place were pigs. Mrs. Skiepmo explained to him that the sow damaged the enclosure and the pigs run out and Mr. Sakowski couldn't take them away
 - Mr. Sakowski was a civilian (she don't know if he had a weapon)
- local collaborators:
- patrols at night
 - were civilians
 - Mrs. Skiepmo doesn't remember how the Germans met those polish collaborators
 - Mrs. Skiepmo doesn't remember how they were signed, but they had bandages on their arms
 - Mrs. Skiepmo doesn't remember if they had weapons (if Germans gave them weapons)
 - Mrs. Skiepmo tells that those polish collaborators were together with the Germans while watching the Jews in front of the church (but she also tells that she weren't looking, because she was scared)
 - Mrs. Skiepmo tells that among the local collaborators were also some people she knew, but didn't have any female friends among them

- Mrs. Skiepkko remembers that they were told to collect barriers in the forest (she doesn't say, if the Poles told them to do so or the Germans), but they couldn't go because of (? She didn't end the sentence)
- Wiesner:
 - Military man (maybe an officer)
 - Mrs. Skiepkko tells that she didn't know him before, rumours said that he was called Wyśniewski, he talked fluently Polish like a Pole

[02:] 06: 18: 03 - [02:] 30: 08: 24

06: 25 – 31: 16

Mrs. Skiepkko talks about the mayor **Stanisław Sołowiej**, who together with the Germans managed the property of the killed Jews and who gave her family one of the Jewish houses to live in. She saw locals digging in the gardens and backyards looking for buried possessions. In the end she answers questions concerning some details of the events she talked earlier about.

- Mayor: Stanisław Sołowiej
 - Mrs. Skiepkko tells that he was a bad person
 - Mrs. Skiepkko tells that he was the brother of her father [Anton Sołowiej]
 - Stanisław Sołowiej also had a butcher's shop
 - Stanisław Sołowiej and her father didn't talk to each other and had a bad relationship, because her grandfather (father of her father) gave the butcher's shop to her father
 - Mrs. Skiepkko doesn't know how he became the mayor
 - His duties/ obligations: Mrs. Skiepkko doesn't know about them
 - Later Stanisław Sołowiej left to **Sarnak**, she doesn't remember when (during the time of occupation), he had a restaurant there, he died there
 - Stanisław Sołowiej had three daughters [Janka (she is still alive), Stasia (she is already dead), Regina (she doesn't know where she is) / they lived/ live (?) in **Sczecinek** [German: Neustettin]]
 - Mrs. Skiepkko and her father didn't have any contact with him or with her cousins

- Mrs. Skiepkó answers why she considers him as a bad person – she asked him someday to buy for her (because he had the possibility) something to wash (clothing), but he didn't give it to her, he was cunning as a fox
- Stanisław Sołowiej together with the Germans managed the property after Jews

What questions does she answer?

- How looked the house she moved in? – It was empty. The house was after (Sanicki)/opposite lived family Wilk (a tall man and a small woman)
- Are there Jewish survivors in Narewka? – No
- Do you know somebody who saw the killing of the Jews? – She tells that she don't remember
- Do you were at the place where the Jews were buried? – Yes, she went there some day to look. She tells that now there is a sign (of remembrance?)
- Do the Jews were buried with cloths on? – Yes. Beforehand they had to hand out all gold.
- Why do you know this? – people told her
- (After the burial) Were there some people digging? – Mrs. Skiepkó tells that she didn't heard of anything like that
- Did people find something in the houses after Jews? – Mrs. Skiepkó tells that she remembers that when they tried to set up a fence they found a container made out of clay with kerosene/ oil in it
- What happened to the local collaborators? – nothing, as if nothing had happened
- What happened with Michał Sakowski? – He left for America. His daughter met him at the airport. She don't know if he is still alive.
- When does the mayor Stanisław Sołowiej died in Sarnak? – Mrs. Skiepkó tells that he doesn't died in Sarnak, but in Szczecinek (earlier she said that he died in Sarnak), she tells that he moved after the war to Szczecinek.
- When did he die? – She thinks that some time after the war. (She tells that she had to ask her male cousin about that (she never mentioned a male cousin before))
- Does he had a butcher's shop in Szczecinek? – She doesn't answer. She tells that her cousin was send to Siberia and after 30 years came back to Narewka. He wanted to surprise her, but she recognized him. Her cousin told her, that he was separated from his father, his mother raised him alone. Mrs. Skiepkó tells that he went to Szczecinek. After that she tells that her uncle (Stanisław Sołowiej?) had a pub

- Were there many of those collaborators in Narewka? – Yes, many. Some stayed in Narewka, some left.
- Does the police hunted those collaborators (after the war)? – No, she didn't hear of anything like that.
- Who dug the holes? – The Jews had to dig them on their own.