

Transcript of the Shoah Interview with Martha Michelsohn

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LAAGE - Michelsohn

REEL 50

Laage 1

Q: Well, Mrs. Michelsohn, you have to help me.

A: yes

Q: because this is.... I was in Chelmo one year ago, but it is hard to imagine how it was at that time.

A: How it was... yes. The church was exactly as it stands here.

Q: Yes, the church is unchanged.

A: not interesting.

Q: No, still; this is very interesting. But this is just the same. Yes. Exactly. But you said that the conditions were very primitive.

A: Very primitive.

Q: Can you describe it?

A: Well, no water pipes. The well was somewhere where one had to fetch the water.

Q: Fetch it?

A: Fetch the water in a pail, draw it from the well.

Q: There was no running water?

A: No, no, not even pumps. It had to be drawn from the well where one had to turn it.

Q: And....

A: And also no electric light. Petroleum lamps.

Q: Just petroleum?

A: Only petroleum lamps.

Q: No electricity?

A: No electricity, no gas, nothing.

Q: Yes?

A: And they burned mainly peat.

Q: Peat?

A: Peat; it was cut there.

Q: And what was the river then, the Ner?

A: Ner, yes, in the spring it always flooded its banks. There was always a flood.

Q: Yes

A: Below was the low country which was totally flooded. Always.

Q: Yes. But you know that today, for example, this Ner is terrible, it is totally....

Corinna: dirty.

A: ...

Q: and it smells, it is unbelievable.

A: That was already then the case, already then.

Q: Yes?

A: Terrible.

Q: The water was never clean?

A: No, no.

Q: No

A: Never.

Q: Were there any fish?

A: I never saw any.

Q: Yes, and you got the water from the river?

A: No, from the well.

Q: From the well

A: From the well

Q: Yes. And how many people did you say were in Kulmhof, how many German families?

A: I think it was 10 or 11.

Q: 10 or 11.

A: W....

Q: This means that....

A: two Union Germans and two Germans, from the Reich, this was the Bauers and us.

Q: Bauers and us... and you?

A: Yes, and Michelsohns.

Q: Yes. But how did you yourself get to Kulmhof? You were born in Laage?

A: I was born in Laage and I was sent there. By the district government, they were looking for someone to look after the settlers, and I applied. That is how I got there. To Kulmhof. First to Warthbruecken, Chelmo, and then to Kulmhof.

Q: From Laage you went directly...

A: No, from Münster. I first was in Münster.

Q: yes

A: I got there from Münster.

Q: But you selected Kulmhof.

A: yes

Q: you have....

A: No, I selected Wartheland.

Q: Wartheland, why?

A: Well, adventure spirit.

Q: Adventure spirit? Yes you were young.

A: I was young.

Q: Yes, you were young.

A: I was young.

Q: And you wanted to do something.

A: yes

Q: yes

A: yes

Q: And what was your first impression of Wartheland?

A: Primitive and primitive again.

Q: What does it mean: primitive again?

A: Well, even worse.

Q: Even worse.

A: Worse than primitive.

Q: Yes. But this is hard to understand.

A: Yes.

Q: Why did you?

A: Totally. The sanitary installations were a total catastrophe. In the office of the Landrat in Warthbruecken was one toilet, and that is where one went. Otherwise.... it was a catastrophe there.

Q: Yes, why one?

A: Yes, there were no toilets anywhere.

Q: There was only one toilet.

A: Yes, otherwise there were only little huts. Impossible to describe.

Q: yes?

A: Impossible to describe, so primitive.

Q: Yes, but it is surprising. Why did you choose to go to such a primitive area of the

A: Well, when one is young, one wants to experience something. One does not believe that such a thing exists. One cannot believe it. But it did exist.

Q: Yes. And so, these 10 German families who lived in Kulmhof, this means how many people in.....

A: Yes, they had quite a lot of children. I cannot tell you.

Q: 100?

A: Yes, possibly, possibly. I cannot tell you for sure.

Q: Yes. And there were Poles there too?

A: Many Poles. They all had stayed there.

Q: Yes. Farmers, also?

A: No, no longer as farmers, but as farm hands with farmers.

Q: Farm hands. The Poles were farm hands.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. And the Poles also worked in the..... there are many woods in...

A: Yes. Between Chelmo and Majdanek, right.

Q: Yes.

A: Were you also there in Majdanek?

Q: Yes, yes. I was there. Yes, yes. Were you also in Majdanek?

A: Yes. It was then still called Maiden.

Q: Maidan, yes?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: There are.... There are two things. Maidan-Tartarski...

A: Yes. This Maidanek was.... Kulmhof. Between Kulmhof and Schuchen.

Q: No, but you mean the Maidanek near Lublin?

A: No.

Q: Another Maidanek.

A: Another Maidanek.

Q: Yes, yes, But I believe the Poles worked also in the woods, right?

A: Yes, yes, also.

Q: Yes.

A: In the woods.

Q: Yes.

A: There were woods....

Q: Yes. Did you know there a German forester....

And his name was May.... May?

A: No. I did not know him.

Q: You did not know him?

A: No.

Q: No. And how was the daily life in Kulmhof for your.... for your husband? How many children were in the school?

A: It was a one-room school. There were about, well, 30 to 40 children...

Q: Yes?

A: all ages, from the youngest to the oldest.

Q: All together?

A: Yes. And on the side he also had the trade school, trade school.

Q: Yes.

A: For farming, only farming.

Q: Ah, farming.

A: He did that in the afternoon.

Q: Yes. And that was a lot of work?

A: What was?

Q: I mean, it was a lot of work, he was very busy.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Yes, yes. Mr. Michelsohn you said that he was born in Riga?

A: Yes he was born in Riga and moved then.

Q: He was an ethnic German?

A: Ethnic German.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: I was German by birth.

- Q: Yes, yes, yes. But... He had left Riga in order to (go to) Kulm.... to Wartheland....
- A: No, He really wanted to go to the Reich.
- Q: Oh, yes.
- A: But they all came first to Wartheland.
- Q: Oh, Wartheland was the first....
- A: the first stop. Yes.
- Q: Yes, yes, I understand. And what was the daily life in Kulmhof like?
- A: Yes, do you mean the instruction in the school or.....
- Q: No, not just the school, but in general...
- A: Oh, there was only one store where it was possible to buy something.
- Q: Yes.
- A: and the rest were only the few farmers that were there. That was the whole village.
- Q: Yes, this is a very small.....
- A: a very small village. It extended along the road and there were only a few houses.
- Q: Yes, and there were two main buildings, right?
- A: Yes.
- Q: The castle...
- A: There was the castle...
- Q: and the church.
- A: and the ch.... Castle and church were almost together. You could not distinguish between them because there was a high fence around it.
- Q: yes.
- A: And there was a town office, across the street.
- Q: Town, that means the German town?
- A: German town office. The Poles had none any more. They had to come to the German town office.

A: And across from it was the school. We lived in it. At first, until we had to get out.

Q: Yes. And when exactly did you arrive in Chelmno?

A: 39, in December

Q: Exactly after the war.

A: Polish campaign.

Q: The victory over Poland. The Polish campaign.

A: December 1939.

Q: This means that you were already in Chelmno when the special forces Bothmann....

A: No, they came later.

Q: But you were already there.

A: I was there already, yes.

Q: Do you remember how that went, this beginning?

A: Yes, they came and said we are here. You have to get out. We have a special force here. We did not learn anything more.
Only later did we see it.

Q: Yes.

A: We are the special forces.

Q: Yes, and they wanted you out.

A: Yes. And we had to leave the house. We were not supposed to see anything, but that was not possible later on. We came back, but got into another house, and then we

saw everything. There was not much to be seen. I told you already, because of the high fence. We only saw the arrival of the transports. There was a small train line...

Q: One moment please.

REEL 51

Laage 2

Q: But you... I did not quite understand. You stayed in the same house or did you....

A: No

Q: to another house.

A: We got..... first I had to get out and then my daughter was born, and then I got again into another house. But they changed in the meantime... The staff went into the other house.

Q: Yes, yes, because the staff wanted.....

A: Yes, they wanted to empty the whole village, that's what they planned. Nobody was supposed to see anything. But they did not succeed.

Q: Yes, they had no success.

A: no, none.

Q: All the people stayed there.

A: They all stayed.

Q: The Poles and the Germans.

A: The Poles and the Germans.

Q: Yes. And what did you know when these people, these Bothmann people, special forces, arrived?

A: yes, we soon saw this when the transports came.

Q: Oh, immediately, at once?

A: Yes.... after a few days, a week. I don't know. First they came in trucks, the Jews. And after some time they built a small train line, and they came on the trains.

Q: A small train line?

A: In the small train. And then they were taken to the church. There they were allegedly deloused.

Q: Yes? Deloused?

A: Deloused. Allegedly. I was not there after all.

Q: Ah,

A: I was not there

Q: Yes.

A: I only heard about it.

Q: They were... first...first into the church?

A: First they came into the church, and had to take off their clothes...

Q: Yes.

A: And then there were work Jews and they had to carry water and do other things. And then.... The majority was put into big trucks and were driven away to Majdanek.

Q: Oh, yes.

A: Into the woods there.

Q: Into the woods.

A: Into the woods.

Q: Yes, and.... but you know that these Jews were executed?

A: Yes, I did not see it.

Q: Yes.

A: I did not see it. But in the evening

there was always a horrible smell over the village...

Q: Oh, smell.

A: from burning.

Q: Yes.

A: Well, I did not see anything. They did it all very secretly. The forest was blocked off and the castle was blocked off and the church. Thus, nothing could be seen.

Q: But I think.... when I was in Chelmno I spoke to people. And the people there said that there were in Chelmno, in Kulmhof two periods. There was a first period...

A: Yes

Q: ... during which the Jews were in the castle... were assembled in the castle and treated.

A: Yes, but not for long.

Q: Oh....

A: They did not stay for a long time. In the castle.

Q: No. How long?

A: I don't know that. You could not check on that. There were daily new arrivals and you don't know when the earlier arrivals leave again, right?

Q: Yes. Daily, there were Jews....

A: Almost daily.

Q: Yes?

A: I also don't really know. There is talk about 40...., 40,000 or 400,000. I don't know how many there were all together.

Q: Yes.

A: who passed through there.

Q: And what were the conditions of these Jews?

A: Terrible, sad to see.

Q: Yes? Why?

A: They screamed. They sensed what was going on.

Q: Oh, they sensed it?

A: Yes, they sensed it. It was horrible screaming. There were women and children and old people and young people, all mixed up.

Q: Yes, and all together...

A: All together mixed into one conveyance... in trucks and later in trains. With the small railroad.

Q: In the train. And these people arrived by car or on foot or by train?

A: With autos, trucks.

Q: Yes. Yes. And how were these people killed?

A: Well, I do not know this. I was not there. I cannot tell you. I only..... I can only guess, but.... I did not see it.

Q: But you had an idea?

A: Well, yes, you could smell it.

Q: yes.

A: that they were burned. But I did not see it. I cannot swear to it.

Q: Yes, and these..... these famous.... famous trucks. I have photos...

A: The gassing trucks?

Q: Yes.

A: This came somewhat later... when it was no longer possible to burn all of them in Majdanek..... could be buried in Majdanek. That is when they started with the gassing trucks. The exhaust gas was led into them, right?

- Q: Well, did you see the gassing trucks?
- A: No. From the outside, sure; they kept driving by on the road. But I never saw inside. I never saw the Jews in there.
- Q: Naturally not. But you did see the trucks.
- A: I did see the trucks. Just like large trucks with containers, right? Large trucks.
- Q: Yes, and what color?
- A: Oh, dark field gray.
- Q: Dark field gray.
- A: With a little green mixed in.
- Q: But large?
- A: Yes. Large. Almost like this room. I am not good at guessing. About like this room.
- Q: Yes.
- A: Very large trucks.
- Q: Yes, and the Jews went into these trucks?
- A: Yes, they were forced to. They were pushed in.
- Q: Yes. And they were killed with gas?
- A: Yes, I assume so.
- Q: Yes, yes, but this is true. Everyone knows this now.
- A: Yes, it is known now. But I did not see it myself.
- Q: Yes, yes.
- A: I saw the outside, as they arrived and as they were loaded. That I did see.
- Q: And the Jews... did you see the Jews?
- A: Yes, when they got in, I did see them.
- Q: Yes. And were they very weak? These Jews?
- A: No, like normal people.

Q: Yes.

A: You cannot say that.

Q: And..... But all the people in Kulmhof knew that these Jews were....

A: Yes.

Q: came there to...

A: be destroyed. Yes. The Poles knew that. And the Poles were happy about it.

Q: Were happy about it?

A: They said: the Jews only brought us misfortune.

Q: Oh, the Poles...

A: The Poles said.

Q: Yes, yes

A: I thought that they would be horrified, but no.

Q: But the Poles were really happy about it?

A: The said, yes.... They brought us so much misfortune.

Q: Yes. And you, yourself, what did you think?

A: I did not say anything.

Q: Think?

A: Think? I think this misfortune will be avenged. It has to be avenged. This cannot end well.

Q: Yes.

A: Any decent person thought that. And I know that the women's club made an effort to have this cease. But they did not succeed. And there was.... was it Himmler, or was it.... who gave the orders.... someone, someone else. He was written to that they should stop. But it was of no use. It just continued.

Q: But this was terrible, right?

A: Terrible, it was terrible.

Q: Every day, every day.

A: Yes, and to always have to see it.

Q: Yes, And did you assemble the Jews in the church during the second period?

A: No, nobody could get in. Nobody could get in.

Q: No, not inside, but from outside.

A: Yes, they were pushed inside.

Q: Yes, and the Jews were in the church all night?

A: Yes, the clothes had to be taken off. And they were distributed among the Poles.

Q: Oh, yes.

A: The clothes of the Jews.

Q: Oh, yes. Distributed among the Poles.

A: among the Poles.

Q: Yes. But I think these things were sent from Litzmannstadt.

A: Litzmannstadt, yes, there were also many there. Litzmannstadt was still a quite undamaged city. I don't know what it is like today.

Q: Yes.

A: At that time it was still quite undamaged. It was the only city where it was still possible to buy something.

Q: Oh, yes, yes. And how many men were in this Special Force Bothmann?

A: I could not tell.

Q: But you were....

A: Well, I only knew Bothmann and Koch.

Q: Bothmann was the boss.

A: Bothmann was the boss.

Q: And how was he?

A: Well, I am saying, he was most often drunk.

Q: Mostly drunk?

A: He was. He himself told me once when he was sober: I cannot do this work when I... With a sober head I cannot do this work. Impossible; nobody could stand this.

Q: Yes, it was necessary for him...

A: Necessary...

Q: to drink.

A: Yes. Otherwise he could not have done this. And he also often went away. He wanted to get to the front and die an honorable death. But it was always... Once he was for a short time in Bulgaria or some place, somewhere in the Balkans.

Q: In Yugoslavia.

A: In Yugoslavia, yes. And then he came back. He reported: I am back.

Q: He came back in 1944.

A: Yes, I don't know when that was, the year. At any rate, he came back.

Q: Yes.

A: And he has.... to the bitter end. He then put a bullet through his head, at least, I assume so. He told me at that time: I have no other choice.

Q: And did you know the worker Jews?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: They had no contact with the population.

Q: They.....

A: The worker Jews.

Q: Because the Poles remember a young Jew

REEL 52

Laage 3

Q: Yes, there are various people of the guard who....

A: Yes, there was also the police.

Q: survivors.

A: yes, yes.

Q: There is also a driver of the gas trucks....

A: Oh, that....

Q: Who is still living. I think his name is Laabs, Gustav Laabs.

A: I don't know. I did not know them by names. The only name is the cook, who is....

Q: Hagen.

A: Hagen. He was the cook. I knew him by name, and Bothmann.

Q: There was Haefele....

A: I did not know any of them.

Q: There was Lenz, there was Burmeister...

A: Yes, I know that name too.

Q: Burmeister? Burmeister, he dealt with the jewelry, with.... he had the suitcases with the Jewish money and jewelry and such things. He was the guard for this. But I was asking, do you remember a young Jew, he was 13 years old, or 14 years old. He was in the so-called worker commando, and the....

A: No, I don't know him.

Q: He sang on the river.

A: On the Ner?

Q: Yes, of the Ner. And the Germans gave him a name: "Spinnefix" (screwball).

A: I know nothing of this. I don't know.

Q: He was very slim. There are only two Jews who came from Kulmhof...

Corinna: survivors.

Q: Survivors. Only two.

A: Only two?

Q: Only two. Yes, only two. And this one he is still alive, this little "screwball."

A: yes, yes.

Q: But now he is 50.

A: Well, sure.

Q: Naturally. Yes, and Mr. Michelsohn stated in his report that he (comment dit-on)

Corinna: he complained

Q:he complained to Bothmann, because.....

A: Yes, he did so.

Q: Yes, why?

A: Well, yes. It is an unreasonable demand for the whole village to have to watch this misery constantly. When the Jews arrived and pushed into the church or into the castle. And this screaming, this is terrible, depressing. Right? If you have to see this spectacle every day in front of you.

Q: Yes, every day.

A: Yes.

Q: Every day?

A: Almost every day.

Q: Yes, and it was very depressing?

A: Yes, very depressing. Because they were people like us, right?

Q: Naturally.

A: That's why it was. And I know that the women's club also fought against this. But it did no good. Nobody was able to go up against them.

Q: Yes, the organization of the women's club?

A: yes, yes

Q: And you were a member?

A: yes.

Q: of the women's club organization?

A: yes

Q: But it was impossible to do something?

A: Nothing could be done. They were stronger.

Q: Stronger.

A: They pushed it through. In spite of the fact that the whole village and all of Warthbrücken, the whole district was fighting against it.

Q: Yes, naturally. And how was it possible to live relatively well in the midst of these awful, terrible events?

A: Yes, we could do nothing else, we had no other choice. My husband had been posted here, and when the government says: It is here where you do your service, you have to do your service, right?

Q: There was also this horrible smell, right?

A: Yes, towards evening there was always this horrible smell all over the area, a smell of burnt corpses.

Q: yes.

A: But this was only at the beginning. When they were gassed, this was no longer.

Q: It was only in the beginning.

A: In the beginning. Later, they were gassed and there was no longer this odor. There were these special trucks, right?

Q: yes.

A: in which they were gassed.

Q: Yes, but I had read that these special trucks came at the beginning. Because in Chelmno, the Jews were killed just by this method, only with the trucks.

A: Only with these trucks? Well, this was so long ago, I assume that at the beginning they were not there. Naturally, I may also be wrong, after such a long time, right?

Q: But what was done against this odor?

A: Nothing was done.

Q: Was it impossible to do something against it?

A: Well, nothing was done. Later, it got better. They may have had another.... At the beginning, they were all still buried. And then for some time was this horrible odor, and what was afterwards at the end, I don't remember. It has been such a long time, it is possible to mix up some things, right?

Q: Yes, yes, naturally. But you said that this Bothmann was always drunk.

A: Most of the time. But always... sometimes for a few hours. He also was a few times at a cure for alcohol addiction.

Q: yes.

A: Yes. In his alcohol. But he said.... When my son was born, it was he who drove me to the hospital. At that time I told him that he was always drunk.

And he responded: I have no choice. I cannot do this job when my mind is clear.

Q: yes. Yes. I think this is not hard to understand.

A: Right? I think so too. That makes sense.

Q: Yes. But your husband also wrote that he complained that Bothmann was with women during the night, and that....

A: Yes, this was.... I don't know this; I did not observe it. If my husband said so, he must have heard it somewhere. I never saw this; I was not outside at night.

Q: That he had orgies... in...

A: Yes, this was. Many women and young girls came in the evenings. That is true. But what happened, I cannot tell you.

Q: But where did these women come from? From what town?

A: From the district city, Warthbrücken.

Q: Warthbrücken?

A: Warthbrücken.

Q: They were Poles?

A: No, German girls.

Q: Yes, Germans.

A: German girls.

Q: Yes, and can you describe – because the castle is totally destroyed. It does not exist any more. How was the castle? Can you describe. Was it a beautiful castle?

- A: Oh, God, just like any other. Not particularly valuable. I did not appreciate it.
- Q: It was a large castle?
- A: Yes, rather large.
- Q: Yes? And there were.... there were doors? It was all closed up?
- A: Yes, I would say that there was a fence all around, so that you could not look through. The fence was at least as high as this room. You really could not see anything. In the castle, and adjoining was also the church.
- Q: Yes.
- A: Yes, the church, the Poles did go there on Sundays, you could still go in there. The clothes of the Poles (sic) were also piled up in the church.
- Q: Yes. The clothes of the Jews.
- A: of the Jews, yes.
- Q: Yes, yes, were there a lot of clothes?
- A: Just what they were wearing, and what they had brought along in small bundles.
- Q: Yes.
- A: They were believing at first, the Jews, that they would be deloused. But afterwards, I think they were suspecting what would be happening to them, because the screaming got wilder and wilder.
- Q: Yes.
- A: They suspected.....
- Q: What kind of screaming?
- A: Yes, only screams of fear. Because they suspected what was happening to them. Right? In the beginning they did not know this.

- Q: Yes.
- A: They really believed that they would be deloused and then brought to a camp.
- Q: Yes. And how many kilometers were there between Kulmhof and the woods where the Jews were buried and burned?
- A: Oh, not very many; 6 to 8.
- Q: Yes? These woods were between Kulmhof and...
- A: Kulmhof and Warthbrücken.
- Q: and Warthbrücken.
- A: Yes.
- Q: And there was only one road, right?
- A: Yes, just one road.
- Q: And this.... these woods were barricaded or...?
- A: Only.... only the places where these horrible things happened. I don't know really what happened there.
- Q: It was possible to drive from Kulmhof to Warthbrücken?
- A: Yes, the road was passable.
- Q: And I have heard, the Poles have said... do you know something about this..... fact. One day, a gas truck exploded?
- A: I don't know this.
- Q: on the road. You have not.....
- A: I did not see that and die not hear about it.
- Q: Never heard about?
- A: No.
- Q: All the Poles today.... remember this story.
- A: This was.... I have not seen anything of this. I was there until 45.
- Q: Yes, yes.

A: January 45.

Q: Yes. And do you remember the day when the camp was liquidated?

A: No. I left a few hours before. And my husband was still in the "Volkssturm" (German territorial army), he still had to remain there. And he said: the SS, they have all left.

Q: Yes.

A: Yes, so, I had already left. I left a day before... that all went.... I believe it was January 21 or 20, approximately. I cannot remember so exactly.

Q: I believe the day of the liquidation was January 18.

A: Oh, that is possible. I don't remember so exactly.

REEL 53

Laage 4

Q: Were you often in Warthbrücke?

A: Not that often, once a week.

Q: Yes. Once a week.

A: Yes. About, for shopping.

Q: Do you remember the Restaurant Riga?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Yes.

A: It was a corner house.

Q: Yes.

A: Yes, yes. I know this, the restaurant Riga.

Q: How was the Restaurant Riga?

A: It was.... how shall I say it: a primitive restaurant where one might go for a drink if the bus was late.

- Q: Yes.
- A: It was nothing special.
- Q: Yes. And.... but it still exists.
- A: Please?
- Q: It still exists.
- A: It still exists?
- Q: Yes. It is somewhat damaged, but the walls...
- A: yes, yes, yes.
- Q:exist.
- A: Oh yes, I remember it.
- Q: Yes. And do you have.... what was the name of the Wartheland Gauleiter.... He was Greiser, right?
- A: No, I did not know him.
- Q: Yes.
- A: He did not come to the villages.
- Q: Yes, he did come to Kulmhof.
- A: Really?
- Q: Yes, yes. He did, he did.
- A: Did? Because I did not see him.
- Q: Yes, and he has.....
- A: He did not greet me.
- Q: given special leave for people of the special forces, and also he invited them to dinner in this restaurant Riga.
- A: Restaurant Riga, ok. I did not know that.
- Q: Yes. That is that is the reason. And your husband said that a small railroad was built....

- A: Yes, I told you that already.
- Q: Yes, yes.
- A: At the end they arrived on this small train and were then sent on from there.
- Q: Yes. And the train came from Powiace.
- A: Eistädt?
- Q: Yes, Powiace.
- A: I don't know.
- Q: Powiace to Kulmhof.
- A: Formerly this was Eistädt. During the war this was Eistädt.
- Q: And do you know this name: the mill Zawadki?
- A: Nah.
- Q: No?
- A: I don't know it.
- Q: No, you don't remember?
- A: No, no.
- Q: And.... but why did you say that the people were buried in Majdanek? This has.... because I have never.... this name...
- A: This was commonly told. They were buried in Majdanek, in the beginning. Later there were too many, they were then gassed or burnt or what ever.
- Q: But these woods are not called Majdanek. But I have seen it myself, this is Ruzsov.
- A: Ruzsov was.....
- Q: Ruzsov. This are the woods between Kulmhof and Warthebrücken.
- A: Oh, that.
- Q: Right?

Q: And this is not Majdanek.

A: No. Majdanek was to the right, coming from Warthbrücken.

Q: Yes?

A: Majdanek. This was formerly called Maiden.

Q: Maiden.

A: Maiden.

Q: Yes. But perhaps there is another Majdanek.... it is a very famous....

A: Yes, surely, near Lublin there is also a Majdanek.

Q: Yes, but this cannot be the same.

A: No, it is not the same.

Q: This is possible. Yes. And what did you think when these people of the Bothmann Commando came back to Kulmhof in 44?

A: Yes. Terrible. This has to come to a terrible end. We always knew that. This has to come to a terrible end.

Q: Yes, but why did these people come back, because....

A: They were sent.....

Q: Yes.

A: from the high command, or by whatever office high up.

Q: Yes. Because once in 1943, the camp had been liquidated. It was finished.

A: Yes.

Q: But they came back.

A: Came back.

Q: Yes.

A: Bothmann was standing there and said: we are here again.

Q: He said: we are back again.

A: We are back again.

Q: And was it the same people?

A: Yes. I assume so. Though, I did – as I already said – know nobody by name, except Bothmann. And that only because he drove me to the hospital when my son was born.

Q: Yes.

A: Otherwise I would not even know this name.

Q: And, at that time, was there a minister in the church?

A: I don't know that. I cannot tell you.

Q: Was the church active?

A: I never saw anything.

Q: No.

A: I never saw anything.

Q: But your apartment was how many meters from the church? Twenty meters? Fifty?

A: Right across. From here to the house over there. Fifty meters.

Q: Yes. Because Kulmhof is such a small village.

A: Yes. It is along one street, farm next to farm. Right?

Q: Yes.

A: Only in front is the church, the castle, and one store was there, and the administration building and the school.

Q: And do you remember when the castle was destroyed? Because....

A: That was supposed to have been during World War I, the castle. We were told.

Q: The castle?

A: The castle. This was not during World War II. We were

told that it was during World War I. We were told. The Poles told us.

Q: No. I know that in 43.... until 43, the castle was used for the extermination of the Jews.

A: Yes, but it was destroyed.

Q: In 43.

A: No, during World War I, it was destroyed. The Jews were exterminated in what remained.

Q: The castle had not been restored?

A: No, not restored. It was a ruin. That means a part of it could not be used any more.

Q: Oh, it was a ruin.

A: Yes.

Q: That I did not know. Nobody....

A: Was not restored. And the Poles told us... we thought it was destroyed in World War II, that it had been destroyed already in World War I.

Q: This means that this ruin.... this ruined castle was used....

A: For the Poles as accommodation and for delousing and such.

Q: For the Jews.

A: For the Jews.

Q: Yes.

A: Otherwise it was not...

Q: Why do you always say "for the Poles" when you want to speak about the Jews?

A: Yes, I misspeak sometimes.

Q: Yes, there is a difference between Poles and Jews.

A: Oh yes, oh yes. Yes.

Q: What kind of difference?

A: Well, That the poles were not exterminated there.

Q: Yes.

A: And the Jews were exterminated. That was the difference. The external difference. Right?

Q: And there are no internal differences?

A: Yes, I cannot judge that, I am not so familiar with this, in knowledge of the soul and of men; what difference there is between Poles and Jews. At any rate, [part of sentence illegible] not suffer.

Q: These Jews, were they religious people?

A: I cannot tell you. I don't know this.

Q: Where there Rabbis?

A: No, I did not see any.

Q: No.

A: They were ordinary people as any others; that is how they arrived.

Q: Were there many women?

A: Many women and children, also men, but mainly old ones. Those who were quite fit where the worker Jews. They got a chain around the feet so that they would not run away, they had to pull the water from the well in the morning and take care of the food and so on.

Q: Oh, these worker Jews...

A: The worker Jews were then not killed in the beginning. That may have come later. I don't know what became of them.

At any rate, they also did not survive.

Q: No, no, only two of them.

A: Only two.

Q: But they..... they had chains?

A: Chains on the feet.

Q: All, chains?

A: Yes, the worker Jews – yes. The other were killed immediately. Yes, the worker Jews had chains, so that they would not escape.

Q: And these worker Jews walked through the village with chains?

A: ahh

Q:walked?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes?

A: Ahh

Q: And was it possible to talk to those people or not?

A: No, no.

Q: It was impossible.

A: This was impossible

Q: Why?

A: Well, nobody dared.

Q: What?

A: Nobody dared.

Q: Yes.

A: Do you understand?

Q: Oh, yes, yes, nobody dared. Why, was it dangerous?

A: Yes, there was surveillance.

Q: Yes.

A: There was supervision.

Q: Always supervision?

A: And it was preferable to not have anything to do with this.

Q: Preferable, naturally, yes.

A: Because it was nerve-wracking to always see that.

Q: Yes.

A: Certainly.

Q: Well, see, when the transports of the trains arrived with these.... We knew what would happen to them. In the beginning they still believed that they were just going to be deloused. And the screaming of these people, Ohhh.

REEL 54

Laage 5

Q: Yes, I have said that it is impossible to imagine.

A: You cannot imagine this. Those who have not lived through it; one cannot make a report on it, it is impossible.

Q: Yes, and this is the reason why the written reports appear so cold and....

A: Tja, this is so cruel and horrible; you cannot describe it. Nobody will believe it. When I told about this in the Reich, that it was like this, I was told: you only make horror propaganda.

Q: Oh, yes?

A: Nobody believed it. So...

Q: When did you tell this?

A: 42..... 43.

Q: When did you.....

A: When I was on leave...

Q: leave....

A: on leave at home.

Q: You told that here in Laage?

A: Yes. Nobody believed that such a thing was possible.

Q: Fantastic. What did you say?

A: What we actually saw with our own eyes, that the Jews were killed. Nobody believed this. Here in the Reich, nobody believed this.

Q: But, for example, your relatives; you talked to your relatives?

A: Well, they did not believe it. This is propaganda.

Q: They thought, that you were.....

A: Yes. I told them that I saw it. They did not believe it.

Q: They said that it was propaganda? What kind of propaganda?

A: Horror propaganda.

Q: Horror...?

Corinna: (in French) Horror propaganda.

Q: Oh, horror, yes. Horror propaganda. But why? Did they not trust you?

A: Well.... this is unimaginable what happened there. You cannot believe it. If you had not seen it yourself, you could not believe it.

Q: But did you try to convince the people?

A: Well, certainly.

Q: But was it not dangerous.... to talk?

A: Oh, well, you had to know to whom you were speaking.

Q: Yes.

A: Right? One had to be careful.

Q: Yes. But all these people who were in this commando, they were so-called "bearers of secrets."

A: yes, yes

Q: They were not allowed to...

A: No.

Q: to talk.

A: They could not talk.

Q: Yes, and you, for example; they did not ask the people who lived in Kulmhof to be silent?

A: Yes, we were not silent. We were fighting. The women got together, but it was of no use. They said that nobody can fight the SS.

Q: Yes, and do you believe that it was just an SS operation, an SS fact?

A: I certainly believe so.

Q: Yes.

A: And the police, what...

Q: Police for... yes, SD

A: yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: Yes. And you never say people who came from Litzmannstadt to Kulmhof?

A: No,

Q: No.

A: No. I saw never anyone from Litzmannstadt.

- Q: No. Because, you know, Kulmhof was founded mainly for the killing of the Jews from Litzmannstadt? There was a very large....
- A: Oh, so. Yes. I once rode through the ghetto.
- Q: Yes, yes. The ghetto in Litzmannstadt. You have seen it once?
- A: I saw it once.
- Q: How was it?
- A: Well, yes. On both sides there was barbed wire and the bus drove through it.
- Q: Yes
- A: I did not see anything else.
- Q: Oh, through on a bus?
- A: Yes, through on the bus.
- Q: Yes, yes, there was a
- A: yes, yes, yes, yes.
- Q: Yes, and do you remember the small villages near Kulmhof? For example Dabie, Dombie?
- A: Yes, what was it called then, in German?
- Q: Oh, yes.
- Corinna: the German names, yes?
- Q: Naturally. All these villages had German names.
- A: They all had German names. There was: Eistaedt, that was to where the train went, the small train, and then there was Zweistadt, and Maiden, and Schuchen.
- Q: Yes.
- A: And.... well, I don't remember exactly.
- Q: There were no longer any Polish names?
- A: No, no, all were German names.

Q: And at that time did you travel in the Generalgovernment?

A: No

Q: You were never in.....

A: No, no.

Q: You (were) never in Warsaw?

A: No, no, no.

Q: Only in Wartheland....

A: Only in Wartheland. Well, as far as Litzmannstadt, that was the furthest.

Q: Yes, but Litzmannstadt was Wartheland.

A: Yes, still Wartheland.

Q: Yes

A: Yes

Q: Yes, Wartheland was a large district.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Posen was also Wartheland.

A: Posen was Wartheland. I was there frequently. My in-laws lived there.

Q: Yes, yes. You have said that it was very depressing on the nerves, I mean...

A: Yes, it was. Without question.

Q: But can you tell me about this?

A: It is impossible to report on this, it cannot be described. One had to live through it, it cannot be described. It was so horrible.

Q: And the.....children of this school, it must have been very difficult for the children to live in such an environment.

A: No, the children feel.... a young person senses this differently. So, these very young ones, these children. They did not... they were not affected,

at least not so much. They did not think that far.

Q: Yes, but what did these children think...

A: They were told: this are the Jews and... they were told: this are the Jews, they are being deloused and then they will go on.
And that satisfied them.

Q: Yes, but the children also knew that the Jews were being killed?

A: Yes, but they did not sense this like we... like an adult person who thinks further.

Q: Yes, But for example, your husband was a teacher. If a child asked... I think this must have happened, why, why....

A: Yes, sure.

Q: so is it with the Jews. It was difficult to answer.

A: It was difficult to answer. One only could say: it is an order. An order from the Reich, right?

Q: Yes.

A: Nothing else could be said.

Q: Yes, yes, but for a small child, what does it mean: an order?

A: Yes, this is difficult.

Q: Yes, but you think that it was not so..... for the children?

A: They have then....

Q: kind of abnormal?

A: They did not suffer moral damage by this.

Q: No moral damage.

A: No, at least not by age 12, not in this manner.

Q: Yes.

A: From then on, a person thinks further, right?

Q: Was there a lot of depression (in French: how do you say)

Corinna: Among

Q: among the Germans?

A: This is impossible to say. Indignation would be a better term.

Q: Yes.

A: Right? Indignation, I don't know how to say it in French.

Q: Yes. Indignation. Indignation, yes. I understand. But the people were not jumpy?

A: Nobody dared. Nobody dared.

Q: Yes.

A: Right?

Q: Yes. It was necessary to hold (it in).

A: It was necessary. You could not say anything and not...

Q: Yes. And was it impossible to go somewhere else when.....

A: No. When you are a civil servant one had to stay where one was sent. My husband was a civil servant, thus he had to stay there.

Q: Yes. But did you never think about going somewhere else?

A: Sure. We wanted. We had registered. We wanted to go at least to a district further west to Hohensalzer or such where nothing so horrible happened. But it was always rejected.

Q: Yes. Always....

A: Always rejected. Well, not too many people were supposed to know about this.

Q: Yes.

A: Right?

Q: Yes, I understand. Yes. It must have been unbearable....

A: Horrible. Horrible. And this injustice, it has to be avenged, it could not come out well. We always said that, and all of them said that.

Q: You already had at that time this...this...

A: Yes, we always said so, this will not come out well. And it does not go well, it did not go well.

Q: Did you have guilt feelings?

A: No, because we were not guilty.

Q: Yes. Not you, naturally not.

REEL 5

Laage 6

Q: Yes, this means, that you.... I don't know if this is a good word – the moral pressure was very high.

A: Yes, it was very high.

Q: Yes.

A: And for this reason, my husband tried again and again to get away, but without success.

Q: Yes, yes. I can....

A: Because we also wanted to spare our children, although they were not aware of anything, they were too young.

Q: Yes. You...

A: But if that had (continued) for a long time...

Q: Fortunately.....

- A: Yes, fortunately. If that had continued for much longer, they also would have suffered.
- Q: Yes. It can produce much damage for ever.....
- A: Yes. Yes.
- Q: produce...
- A: yea.
- Q: produce. Yes. And you said in the beginning that the Poles were happy about what was going on.
- A: Yes, the Poles were.
- Q: This....
- A: They were not indignant, they said: they deserve this. They starved us or....
- Q: Starved...
- A: Starved.
- Q: And it was true...
- A: Well, I cannot judge this because before the war I was not in Poland. For this reason, I cannot judge this.
- Q: Yes. But you are totally right, because I also talked to the Poles...
- A: They have....
- Q: Still today.... they say the same thing...
- A: Yes, the same thing.
- Q: That they were the servants of the Jews, etc...
- A: Yes, yes.
- Q: And they also say that the Jews were very rich, and the Poles in Kulmhof, for example,
- A: Were poor Poles.
- Q: poor.

- A: Poor, very poor.
- Q: Yes, but they say that the Jews always came to Kulmhof with much gold, jewelry...
- A: I did not say that.
- Q: The Poles.
- A: Oh, the Poles, yes.
- Q: Yes.
- A: They then took it all from them.
- Q: Yes.
- A: Clothes, jewelry.
- Q: Yes.
- A: I don't know who got this.
- Q: Yes. But was it your opinion that it is true that these Jews were rich people?
- A: Hmm.
- Q: Or poor people?
- A: Oh, mixed, all kinds.
- Q: All kinds.
- A: The..... I think that they systematically emptied the cities of Jews and then brought them to Kulmhof. I don't know this. There were rich ones and poor ones, old ones, young ones, children. Every kind.
- Q: Yes. And is it true that the Jews always came with diamonds, with jewelry, they were in their clothes...
- A: I don't know that.
- Q: The Poles say so...
- A: The Poles say? So. This may be, I did not observe this because we did not get so close. We only say how they were driven in.
- Q: The loading?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: The loading into the gas trucks?

A: Well, you could not really observe this.

Q: Yes.

A: You could not get so close.

Q: It was impossible to observe straight on?

A: Was not possible. Was not possible, no.

Q: But one could see (French) how do you say from the side?

Corinna: Sideways

Q: Sideways.

A: No. You could not see anything.

Q: Yes.

A: We also did not stop; this was prohibited.

Q: But whenever there was an action, it was possible to walk on the street, or was it....

A: Yes, one could walk, but stand still and look at the castle, one could not do.

Q: No. But one could walk.

A: Yes, that may have been possible, but we did not do it.

Q: Yes, but it was not really cordoned off?

A: No, just the fence...

Q: Yes, yes. Only....

A: Around the castle.

Q: Yes. Around the castle. Yes, I understand, I understand. And I see in the report that Mr. Michelsohn was the head of the NSW...

A: NSV. This is the same thing as today welfare. Welfare, Welfare.

- Q: Yes.
- A: This.... In German this was called "National Socialist People's Welfare."
- Q: Yes, this means....
- A: Well, he had to take care of the poor people.
- Q: Oh, yes.
- A: That was that. What is today welfare. Right?
- Q: But for which poor people?
- A: Only for the for the poor German families there.
- Q: Only for the Germans?
- A: Only for the few Germans in Kulmhof. Nothing else.
- Q: These German farmers in Kulfmhof were....
- A: They were....
- Q: also poor people?
- A: Poor people. They came from Volhynia with hardly any luggage, very poor people.
- Q: And they have.... What did they get when the came..... when these people came to Kulmhof...
- A: The got land from the Poles.
- Q: Yes.
- A: And from the Reich they got seed and equipment, whatever they needed. For that there were people who looked after them.
- Q: Yes.
- A: They were there so that they were able to farm. Because they were not used to that. They came from Volhynia, deep in Russia and were not used to modern equipment.
- Q: Where.... where is Volhynia?
- A: Volhynia?

Q: Yes.

A: In Russia.

Q: Yes, but where in Russia?

A: Well, you are asking too much of me. I am not that well informed.

Q: Volhynia, this is....

A: I think in Eastern Russia.

Q: Yes, this is Baltic...

A: No, Baltic is in the North. My husband is from there, Riga. No. Volhynia, that's.... must be in the East, of Russia.

Q: Oh, this means that Mr. Michelsohn took care of the welfare for the Germans.

A: Yes, yes, for these people. He did nothing else. He was a small fry.

Q: Small what?

A: fry.

Q: fry, what does that mean?

Corinna: A little man.

Q: Oh, yes., yes, yes. And you yourself, you (taught) knitting, how do you say?

Corinna: Needlework.

A: Needlework. For the few children. There were not many. Of the 20 children, about half were boys. Thus, there were not many children. I taught them to knit and crochet.

Q: But.... what did you make? Sweaters?

A: Oh, there was no material. Repair stockings and a little crochet.

Q: Yes.

A: Whatever one does at first to get the fingers used to.

- Q: There was no material?
- A: Barely any. Whatever the children brought along was good. There was nothing from the government.
- Q: Yes? It was difficult.
- A: Difficult, it was difficult. It was difficult.
- Q: And was there enough to eat?
- A: In Wartheland there was enough to eat. The farmers had all great numbers of ducks and geese.
- Q: Yes, there are many ducks.
- A: Many ducks and geese and eggs and...
- Q: Yes. There are even today many....
- A: Still today...
- Q: many geese and ducks in Kulmhof.
- A: Yes. Yes.
- Q: Oh yes, many.
- A: Yes, then too. And the children brought the teacher ducks and geese.
- Q: Oh, yes, as gifts.
- A: Yes, yes, as bribes.
- Q: Yes, the children of the farmers
- A: yes, yes, yes.
- Q: Yes, yes (in French: what does it mean? Tell me, I don't understand "Wohlfahrt")
- Corinna: Wohlfahrt is charity.
- Q: Oh, Wohlfahrt is charity. National Socialist ...
- A: Peoples welfare.
- Q: Welfare. And Mr. Michelsohn was education leader of the NSDAP, right?
- A: Yes, for these few people there. He was education leader.
- Q: Yes.
- A: I don't even know. But if he said so....

It must be so. There only were, as I just said, not more than 10 German families. Right?

Q: Yes

A: And these were then politically educated.

Q: A political school?

A: Yes, yes, some evenings they got together. There was nothing more.

Q: There were lectures?

A: Lectures about... about the war, how far the war had gone, what we had lost and what.... what we had won, etc., nothing else.

Q: And at that time, did you yourself have hope for a victory?

A: No, No., My husband neither.

Q: When did you lose hope?

A: Stalingrad

Q: Stalingrad

A: Stalingrad.

Q: You remember Stalingrad?

A: Yes, yes. When that happened, we said that now it is finished. Hopeless.

Q: (in French) How do you say "clair-voyant"?

Corinna: clear-sighted.

Q: Yes. You were very clear-sighted, because there are not so many people who....

A: Oh, I wouldn't say that.

Q: Really. And all the Germans who lived in Kulmhof, were they members of the NSDAP?

A: I cannot tell you that. My husband only became a member of the NSDAP when he came into the Reich.

- Q: Yes.
- A: He was a German from outside the country.
- Q:43
- A: and everything came together at once, right?
- Q: Yes. It was an order.
- A: Yes. He became a citizen and at the same time got his party book.
- Q: Yes, but it was how do you say.... it was just a formality.
- A: Yes, yes, yes.
- Q: Because there was not much to do in such a small village..
- A: No. There was hardly anything to do. I... Those few German families there.
- Q: Yes. Yes. (In French: we have to thank Mrs. Michelsohn).

REEL 56

Laage 7

- Q: Yes. When did you arrive in the Eastern area, 39?
- A: 39.
- Q: Yes, my question is as follows: Were you afraid of the East?
- A: No.
- Q: No.
- A: No.
- Q: No.
- A: No, no.
- Q: What is the... What means the East in your view of the world?
- A: Yes. This was drilled into us, this freedom and this space, something one did not know anymore in the West. The unending space, right? That tempted me.
- Q: Space?

A: Here, everything is so compressed, man by man. And there was this immeasurable space.

Q: This means that you wanted space?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Yes, yes. But this landscape, it is....

A: I did not imagine that, that it would be so primitive and dreary.

Q: Yes, and in winter it is terrible...

A: Terrible.

Q: It is very cold, right?

A: Well, sure. Snow was this high, and storms.

Q: Yes, and this landscape is totally flat.

A: Yes, there are woods, but no mountains.

Q: Yes. Were you disappointed?

A: Well, yes. First yes, but one says to oneself: you have to, and then it got better, right?

Q: Yes. And you have thought that it was your duty?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: For your country?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes?

(Mrs. Michelsohn sneezes)

A: Thank you.

Q: Yes, you thought it was your duty for....

A: Yes.

Q: For your country.

A: Yes. To help.

Q: To help. And you were a.... You were very young at that time?

- A: How old was I then? Late twenties.
- Q: Yes. And were you a member of the BDM?
- A: No, for this I was too old.
- Q: You were too old.
- Q: But earlier?
- A: Earlier.... No, I was never in the BDM because I.... when I was of the right age, there was no BDM yet.
- Q: Yes.
- A: And later I was too old.
- Q: Yes. You were member of a....
- A: Of a women's club.
- Q: Of an organization?
- A: Women's club. Organization. But not in the party.
- Q: Yes. It was a mass organization.
- A: yes. Yes.
- Q: And what was for you the worst year?
- A: Yes, right when the Jewish actions began.
- Q: And can you remember when it started?
- A: I cannot say exactly.
- Q: Was it winter?
- A: I think it was..... yes....no, spring.
- Q: No.
- A: No, they came ... Bruno was born in 42, right? It has to be 42 when the Jewish actions started. Yes. 42.
- Q: No.
- A: No?
- Q: No.

A: In Kulmhof...

Q: I... This is clear. The first action was on December 7, 41.

A: Well, yes. I must have been away. 42. That's when we were evicted from our apartment.

Q: Yes, but it was December 41.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: It's no big difference. But do you remember in 1940, when there was an unending resettlement desire? I mean...

A: Yes.

Q: The Germans came from Volhynia and the Jews....

A: Germans from the Black Sea, from Bessarabia.

Q: Yes, it was a whole....

A: Yes, yes. They were all fetched and all got into Wartheland.

Q: Yes.

A: They were supposed to get into the Reich later on.

Q: yes. But did you believe that later there would be other possibilities, that other areas in the East...

A: Yes. They believed that.

Q: Yes.

A: They all sincerely believed it and for this reason they came.

Q: Yes. And what did you think in June 41, at the beginning of Barbarossa?

A: Barbarossa, I don't know what this is?

Q: The Russian war.

A: Oh, the Russian war. Yes. They always thought that they would win.

Q: Yes.

- A: They believed. As I told you already. After Stalingrad it was finished.
- Q: Yes. But Stalingrad was in 43.
- A: That was 43, yes.
- Q: Yes. But when the invasion of Russia in June 41...
- A: 41....
- Q: Yes, started...
- A: Then they believed it.
- Q: What did they believe?
- A: We will conquer the Russians and they would get good land and they will live well The resettlers.
- Q: Yes, but..... yes, but Russia was bit.... big part to...
- A: You know....
- Q: To eat, right?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Yes. But your idea..... your idea – this is my last question – the idea of the East, you were not afraid of the East?
- A: No, I was not afraid.
- Q: Because I am always afraid of the East.
- A: Yes, now I am also afraid of the East. Now, now I am wiser. But at that time....
- Q: When I want to leave Paris, when I travel, when I have to travel, I always prefer to travel to the West.
- A: Yes, I understand that.
- Q: I prefer not to the East.
- A: Yes. But at that time this attracted me.
- Q: Yes, at that time?
- A: At that time I was attracted, at that time I was young

and this immense space.... I was attracted. Here in the West, people are all on one heap, and no possibilities...

Q: But why did you not, for example, choose to go to France? Because France in 40.... France was finished? You could have gone to France?

A: Yes. You were half sent and half wanted to go.

Q: Yes.

A: Right? Do you understand?

Q: Yes I understand.....You have no memory of this little "screw ball?"

A: No. Not at all. I never heard anything about this.

Q: He did.....

A: Is he still alive?

Q: He is still alive, yes. He told me... he sang a German song for me, a German song which he sang in Chelmno, I Kulmhof and which the SS taught him. It is: When the soldiers march through the town.....

A: Oh yes. "The girls open windows and doors."

Q: Yes, and.... and...

A: I don't know any further. He sang that? No, I have no memory of that.

Q: And all the Poles...

A: The Poles knew all that?

Q: Yes. All of them

A: I did know Poles. I don't even know if they are still alive. I had a Polish woman. Her name was Janrushka. The Poles...

they were so.... they hid underneath. They were resettled and then had to hide with the next one, and so on. It was a sad story.

Q: Yes, yes. And you had Poles in your house as help?

A: Yes a helper.

Q: Yes?

A: Yes.

Q: A girl?

A: A girl.

Q: Yes, naturally peasant.

A: A peasant girl. A nice girl.

Q: A nice girl?

A: When the flight started, she packed my things.

Q: Oh, yes?

A: Yes, and she accompanied me to Posen. Carried the children.

Q: How did to travel?

A: I went by train.

Q: By train?

A: Train.

Q: Were there no air raids?

A: No. That did not exist in the East. We were spared air raids. The Russians did not do that. Only when the offensive started, then.....

Q: Yes, yes, they had no....

A: Almost during the whole time.... We also did not have blackouts.

Q: Oh, yes? No blackouts?

A: No, that was only here in the West. Air raids

we had....

Q: But there was no great risk. You had no....

A: Yes, we, anyhow, did not have any light. Kerosene lamps.

Q: Yes, hard to imagine.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: But now there is light in Kulmhof.

A: Oh, there is light?

Q: Oh, yes.

A: That is progress.

Q: Yes, this is progress. Socialist progress.

A: Oh yes, Socialist progress. We should give credit for this.

Q: And....

A: But otherwise, the houses are still as primitive, right?

Q: Yes, there is a little progress. This is.... It is, after all, 35 years later. This is a very old story.

A: Yes. Sure. One tend to forget this.

REEL 57

(no pictures)

Laage 9

A: We tried this, but the people were in part quite primitive, they did not really understand this. We have tried, as we...

The historic development of... Europe.... of Germany. But.

Q: to to learn.

A: Yes, yes. What else is there? I am finished.

Corinna: He has to make another few (Aufnahmen) recordings? Pictures?....

Q: The.... I wanted to ask: the.... the cleanliness was a big question?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Why?

A: Well, yes. The whole circumstances were so: there was no running water, and certainly no bathrooms, and... soap was only available a little with stamps, and washing — they did not value it very much.

Q: Yes, and these people, these Poles, they were dirty?

A: Oh God, I cannot really say dirty. Somewhat neglected. There were dirty ones, but there were also very clean ones.

Q: Yes.

A: There were also very clean ones.

Q: Yes, yes. And the... the hygienic condition of the Jews, for example, were very bad?

A: That was bad.

Q: Yes, they were....

A: Well, I really don't know. They fetched water from the Ner, the river down there, otherwise I don't know, to what extent..

Q: I mean the worker Jews.

A: They were allowed to fetch the water.

Q: Yes.

A: But to what extent they were allowed to use it, what was done with it, that is beyond my knowledge.

- Q: But in the... in the ghetto, for example, I have read that the conditions were very bad. There was no cleanliness., etc.
- A: Yes, but I only saw a ghetto in Litzmannstadt and there, as I said, I only rode through. There was a wide street and barbed wire on both sides.
- Q: There was no ghetto in Warthbrücken?
- A: No, I did not see one.
- Q: No. I have... I have.... I don't know, I have....
- A: There may have been on before my time, that I don't know.
- Q: Yes. Perhaps. Because the process of ghettoization started already in 1940 in many cities, many, many places.
- A: I don't know about this.
- Q: Yes. Good..... let's go, let's go. I thank you very much.
- A: Please, please.
- Q: It was very nice of you and very....
- A: I really did not think that you would still come.
- Q: You have helped me a great deal.
- A: Really?
- Q: Oh, yes. Because there is much information. And this is information of witnesses.
- A: Yes, yes. Yes.
- Q: And this is always, always better..... Do you still think about these events now?
- A: Oh, yes.
- Q: Yes.
- A: Really, I often think of it.

Q: Yes.

A: Yes.

Q: Frequently?

A: Yes.

Q: How so?

A: Well, what you have lived through and what was so terrible, you don't forget. From time to time that comes to the surface, right?

Q: Do you dream?

A: Sometimes.

Q: About these.....

A: Yes, yes. Yes, yes. This does not go by without leaving traces. It is often pushed aside by daily living, right? But often it does come back to the surface. Particularly, when my husband was still alive, we often talked about it.

Q: Oh, yes. With your husband.

A: With my husband.

Q: Yes, naturally. You were able to talk about it.

A: Yes, yes, because we both had the same experiences.

Q: Same experiences.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. And when you dream, what kind of dreams? Always the same dreams?

A: Always the same. Always.... I mean not often, this is.... but from time to time it comes through. The horrible experiences with the.... with the Jews, the way they were pushed into the cars, and the screams... and of the children and the old people. Interestingly, young... young people were rarely among them. I never saw young men.

Q: Yes.

A: They were probably used for work somewhere, right? I assume.

Q: But did you.....

A: Yes.

Q: But this is your dream, you see....

A: Yes.

Q: these gas trucks....

A: Yes, yes.

Q:with people...

A: and these screams.

Q: Can you describe these screams?

A: No, no, no. That is not possible.

Q: But these Jews, what language did they speak?

A: Yes, that I don't know. We never got that close. One only heard these screams. The language.... at the beginning they were supposed to come from Germany.

Q: Yes.

A: Right?

Q: yes, there were German Jews.

A: And later they may have come from the East.

Q: Was there a difference between the German Jews and the....

A: Oh, yes. There was a big difference. The Eastern Jews all had long beards and here, black, and a kippah on. The Western Jews did not have that. They appear like any other European. There was no difference. But the Eastern Jews they looked very, very different.

- Q: Yes.
- A: You could recognize them from far away. They also wore long caftans, dark brown.
- Q: They.... they were very different?
- A: Very different, very different.
- Q: And your first impression, what did you think?
- A: My.....
- Q: Yes, first impression of these....of these people?
- A: I felt sorry for them, these people. After all, they were people like any other, right? This was a crime against humanity.
- Q: Yes. You thought so already then?
- A: Yes, certainly. Immediately when I saw that, I saw it as a crime, that cannot finish well.
- Q: Yes. No, it was a horrible matter.
- A: Horrible matter.
- Q: Unimaginable. And if one... I have in Kulmhof... this matter.... in these forests seen the huge ditches and this is unimaginable. It is 300 meters long.....
- A: Yes, yes, this is in Majdanek where....
- Q: Yes....
- A: In the forest.
- Q: In the forest. But this is not Majdanek, this is Ruzsov.
- A: Ruzsov? I think this is Schuchen. Formerly Schuchen.
- Q: Yes.
- A: in German.
- Q: Yes, yes. This is the forest between...
- A: Yes, yes, yes...

A: Yes Kovo was called....

Q: Yes, I could not believe it. This ditch is 300 meters long...

A: Yes.

Q: And 30 meters wide. And it was so deep....

A: Terrible, terrible.

Q: And do you know how many Jews were killed there?

A: I did know, but I.... if I give you a number I may say something wrong; I prefer not to name one. ... It was something with 4. Was it 400,000 or 40,000 – I cannot tell.

Q: There is a big difference.

A: Yes. That is why. I prefer not to say anything. It was enormous. A large number.

Q: It is 400,000.

A: 400,000 are.... Yes, it was something with 4; I did not want to say something wrong.

Q: No, this is...

A: This has been proven, right?

Q: Yes, yes. This....

A: Sad, sad, sad, sad.

Q: It is known, today. Good, good, let's move on. Thank you.

A: Please.