

-TITLE- OREST ZAHAJKEWICZ & HELEN MELNYCZUK
-I_DATE-
-SOURCE- CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY- FAIR
-IMAGE_QUALITY- GOOD
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

01:00 -They were born in western Ukraine; Orest in 1925 and Helen in 1921. They lived in Paremsh (ph.) on Charn (ph.) River -Their father was a teacher of political literature. He had 4 children, the youngest born in 1936. Their life was religious but not strictly so; every week they went to church. They were Ukrainian Catholics, who were called Greek Catholics at that time. The children were taught their moral values in the family.

02:00 -Their father's students spoke about him with great respect. He had several poor students whom he helped finish their education. He stressed learning and attainment of knowledge as the only way to do something good for the country. -The Ukraine fell under the Polish government, which sometimes persecuted Ukrainians, and some left for different countries if they had the means.

03:00 -Their father was always invited to the synagogues for the holidays, and had Jews as friends. In the high school there were Jews. -Their mother was a school teacher but had no time to teach after her marriage. -Orest's older brother was arrested by the Soviets and sent to Siberia. A friend of his, a Jew, didn't get along with his stepmother and ended up staying with their family, even when the Germans were there.

04:00 -The law at that time (1941) demanded that one work for the Fatherland, so one had to either go to Germany for a summer or do something in the town. The Germans went to Poland in 1939 and stayed in their town for 3 weeks. But Paramesh was divided into two by the river, with one side under Soviet occupation, and the other under the Germans. They were under the Soviets, who often arrested many of the intelligencia, priests and judges, and sent them to Siberia. They found out later that Siberia, but at the time the schools were reopened and he taught there. The Soviets nonetheless called him every couple of weeks, especially when their brother was arrested.

05:00 -Their father met an architect, who was the head of a huge German warehouse, where Jews were taken from the ghetto to work. The architect told him to send Orest to work in the office.

Orest went to work there and met many people including a Jewish banker named Lanzman, and a doctor Reinhart (ph.), also a Jew from the ghetto. He also met a Jewish engineer, who had 2 girlfriends, who wanted to escape to Warsaw, which looked like the safest place. The ghetto was in the middle of the town in the Ukraine, and was called "Jewish Town," from which 100 workers would be brought into the warehouse. There were close to 20 000 people in the ghetto, and 50-60 000 people in the town. The Jews thought that those that worked would be spared.

06:00 -At first the older people were shipped away to an unknown place by freight trains, but even Jews didn't know why or where they were going. For example, a friend of theirs, Mr. Shapner (ph.), told them that when they took his mother away, he didn't know what would happen. People didn't know what type of deportation it was. There was no t.v. or radio, only German news, but no open talk. Orest knew what was happening because of the people he worked with. They spoke of people in hiding, people who were escaping by sewers. In many apartments, people made connections entering into sewage lines; but the Germans soon began their questioning.

08:00-Many thought that if they gave information on those in hiding, that they would be spared. They knew a man who's daughter gave out such information, who was eventually shot. Little by little the people found out what was going on. For example, there was shipment of clothes through the warehouse, for German soldiers on the eastern front who weren't prepared for the winter. Lanzman told Orest to take some clothing for his brothers and sisters, but they saw that the clothes had hard stains, and some had holes. They came to the conclusion that the clothes came from the camps, from those shot and stripped. This was among the first signs that there was something wrong.

10:00 -Soon the Germans forced the Jews to wear the yellow stars, but still no one could imagine the atrocities that were going on, which included using human skin for lamp shades.

10:30 -In 1933 the Ukrainians experienced their own Holocaust, when 7-10 000 Ukrainians were starved to death under Stalin. Many thought, perhaps, that when the Germans came they would help them fight the Russians and get their independence. But they soon saw that they wanted to annihilate them because they were not of the "super race." In 1941 and 1942 they killed several famous Ukrainian leaders. There was an underground Ukrainian army, and once in a while a German was killed, but the result was that 30-40 Ukrainians were killed with each German death.

11:00 -Lanzman knew about the killing of the Jews and asked Orest if he knew anybody who would hide someone. Reinhart asked him if he would make contact with the underground for him, and ended up staying with Orest until the underground could help him. He was the first to stay with them.

11:30 -Some people walked around with an arm band, but Orest often saw the engineer walking in town without one; he was unafraid. One day he and his 2 girlfriends went to Warsaw. Helen said that it is always those people who are unafraid who survive.

12:00 -Reinhart was the first to stay with them, then Shapner in September 1943. One night after the 9:00 curfew, someone knocked on the door and Helen answered it, and it was Shapner. Her father had known him since he was a child. The Shapner boys went to the high school. Mr. Shapner was retired, over 60, and he and his wife were very devoted parents, with 4 obedient sons. One story Helen remembers is of a boy who committed suicide after the graduation exams; his friends wanted to take revenge on those teachers who had given the child an F, among whom was Helen's father. Scared, her mother and all the children slept at the Shapner's home.

13:00 -That night, the youngest Shapner boy stood at the door with a woman hiding behind him. He told Helen to give him the keys to the cellar. Orest led them down, not speaking, for 6 other families lived in the apartment and in the next apartment there were Germans. They stayed in the cellar for a few days. They explained to Orest's father that they were in the ghetto, but had escaped (Sept. 1943). The Germans had begun to liquidate the ghetto by killing; they couldn't get everybody out so they were burning the people. Orest had heard what was going on but didn't realize until then up to what extent. Shapner told them that at night they would kill Jews and throw them into army trucks and drive them to mass graves after curfew. They loaded the corpses during the day and Shapner had slipped in on top of the corpses, later climbed out and went to their house.

15:00 -They made a hiding place in the pantry for times of danger, and at night , he moved freely around the house.

15:10 -They had Reinhart, Shapner and his wife in the house. The other Shapner brothers, the two older ones didn't survive, while one did but was killed after the war in 1945 in a car accident.

15:15 - There was another family in the house before Shapner. One night she awoke to voices of 2 people beside her father (they shared a room); a man was telling her father how everyone had refused them, and that he was the last one they could turn to for help. He was her dad's pupil, and told him he wouldn't stay long, just long enough to get tickets to Warsaw. The next day her dad bought tickets and saw them off on the train. They received a telegram a day later that they were safe. After the war they met up in Paramesh, and said how sorry they were that Helen's family had to leave the town. They had left because they had found out that their name was on the Soviet's deportation list. They escaped before they were sent to Siberia in 1941, but the father believed it was only temporary.

16:00 -Their mother died in 1942, and the father worked. They needed someone to look after things. A woman was working for a German official, who at one point gave her the weekend off. Having overstayed one day, he got very mad and decided to send her to Germany to work in a factory. She spoke to a priest and he asked their father if something could be done, and she then became their housekeeper. Therefore, Maria was spared. She disliked Helen, however, for she often told her to look after specific things in the house, and got so mad one day she threatened to turn them in. Orest told her that if she did, having worked for them for 6 months, that she would be the first to be shot. From then on she was silent.

18:00 -One day Orest was returning from work and on his street, and a few houses down, where Jews who were hiding, were police. They had been careless and had gone onto the roof, and someone had called the police. The police took them away, as well as the people hiding them.

18:50 -In Orest's house there was a professor living there. He had nearly been sent to Germany to carry out forced labor, but someone had told their dad about it. Their father told the authorities that he needed him for a new school he was opening, and they let him go and he stayed with them.

19:00 -There were quite a few people in the house; Maria, the professor, the Shapners and Helen's future husband. At that time he was Orest's friend who had no place to go. The French Gendarmerie had taken over where he lived and threw everyone out. There were many police forces in their town because it was a border town. Later on, as they fled, Helen and this friend, Edward, married.

19:15 -Everyone in their house survived except for the Professor. He was killed by a machine gun in a raid in Germany. -The Shapners are now in Israel; they met at one point in Germany. -From the town, they left the house separately. The Shapners left with Maria, and Orest's family, on the last train. -They knew, at that time, of others who were hiding Jews, but no one talked about it.

20:00 -In the house, they either played Bridge or danced. Across the street lived the Chief of the Ukrainian police. He asked their father what was going on in the house because he sees the children dancing; he told him to put the shades down. The Chief was a friend of the fathers and tried to arrange , through a priest, a wagon to come at dusk to bring the Jews to some other place in the village to join the underground. But this was thought to be more dangerous, for someone could discover what house they came from.

21:00 -Helen fled with her sister and father, the professor, Orest and her future husband. They went to Krakov (ph.) where Helen's uncle was living, then to Prague, where there was a big Ukrainian population due to immigration before WWI. A friend of hers told her to go there and that she could get her dad a job at a museum.

But a Gestapo head was killed there at that time and the Germans were so mad, they sent away the people who came to Prague at certain times, as well as the undesirable. In July 1944 they were sent to Ravensbrück where there were some factories. In Prague they had lived in a friends room in a dormitory, and tried to get a permit to stay in Prague but couldn't.

22:00 -In the meantime, their uncle in Krakov left for Vienna when the Soviet army was approaching. He met up with Helen's future husband's brother, and through him sent word that their father could get a job in Vienna in a factory. They all went except the professor. -They stayed until 1949 in Germany. In 1950, Orest, his dad and Christine(youngest) went to the Ukraine. In 1951 Helen and her husband returned also.

22:30 -The Shapners searched for them; went to Germany and tried to find them, and eventually contacted them. Shapner later went to speak to their father about going to Israel. Shapner had moved to Israel in 1949. He told the family that he put their names in the Yad Vashem. Orest and Helen went to plant a tree and saw the Shapners in Israel. -Helen has 2 children and Orest has 4. They are all very proud of what their parents have done.

23:00 -Question: What would you like other children to know?
-Answer: Orest replies he wants them to be good, to be Christian. Helen interjected saying that no, they should not be Christian but human, be their brother's keeper. -Helen thinks her kids are very good kids. Orest's son, for example, one day helped an older man who was searching for a parking space, offering him his own. On another occasion he helped someone out who couldn't start their car in the winter.

23:50 -Helen exclaims how proud she is of her bother, and how, apart from their father, she has never met such a nice man. She believes that his children take after his example. -They are glad to be in America. They went through so much that it was a peaceful change. When Orest first came, he had to buy a second-hand suit; he explains how life teaches you how to do things, how to survive. -He went to a brewery school in Germany, and now works in a brewery since 1951 and will retire. -Question: Do you ever speak about the war to others here? - Answer: Orest answered that once he was speaking to a man named Gilbert, in the brewery about prejudice and he told him his story. He told the Jewish head of a library (?), who sent them a letter. -When his mother got sick, she went to a hospital in the Ukraine, but it was too late, for she had kidney cancer. - One day he was looking through his window and saw a big commotion on the street. A woman in a house across the street was in the window, pointing to the police to look in a house across the street. The woman claimed Jews were living there, and they were eventually caught. -Many of the families were Polish around where they lived, they were the only Ukrainian family. -Time is healing and people have a tendency to forget things, and try not to bring them back.

For example, Orest speaks of the corpses he saw in an uncovered torture chamber near his home, and his reluctance to revive that memory. -It is hard for those who didn't see what was going on to understand the true horrors, therefore it is difficult to speak of what went on. The best we can do is to teach our children to love each other. -When Helen sees her children fight, her husband reminds her that one can't change human nature.
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