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THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

Interview by GAY BLOCK and MALKA DRUCKER
with VLADYSLAW WYRWA
May 15, 1988

They are still at dinner. The interviewer is
0:02:16 saying that the family of the rescuer is important in that they want to know what kind of family produces a rescuer.

0:03:14 They have been in New York for 7 years, 15 months.

0:07:15 The father was employed in Czech coal mines.
0:07:37 He was born in 1913 in Bochnia, Poland.
0:08:01 His mother came from Czechoslovakia

0:09:10 He had an older brother and sister, but they died before he was born.
0:09:37 He is the youngest. Bochnia had 20,000 people. It is a big ghetto.
0:10:55 He went to school with Jews, but had no particular Jewish friends.

0:12:15 His family motto was "life and let others live, and help those who need help."

0:13:20 He didn't really see his family help anyone in need.

0:14:15 The first time he saw what was happening to the Jews, he was living with his parents at the time of the establishment of the Ghetto in Bochnia. He used to deliver food to the Ghetto.

0:16:00 Pavlic was a family whose son attended school with him in a neighboring town.

0:17:00 For some months they had talked about liquidation of the Ghetto because food was scarce and everybody was asking their outside friends for help.
0:17:38 Arsets helped 36 people.

0:18:15 Zolman's (friend) wife and his son looked Polish, but Mr. Zolman did not. So he took them out of the Ghetto.

0:19:00 They had a son of age 20.

021~:0~ At th~t tlme, l~ w~ no~ too ~lg a rl~k to return to Poland, so his son and wlfe left.

0:20:21 He had to walk Mr. Zolman through the entire city in daylight. They were nervous and sweating. They managed to get him out. It was very dangerous.

0:22:17 Zolman's parents had a hidlng place prepared in the country.

0:23:28 His wife and son were already at his parents', along with one of hly brothers. Mr. Wyrwa took Mr. Zolman.

0:24:00 Mr. Wyrwa helped them in the country by bringing them food.

0:24:30 Four people Ytayed in the cellar until the end of the war, when they returned to Krokaw.

0:25:34 He still keeps in touch with them. He spent two weeks wlth hlm ln lYrael about three

0:26:05 years ago.

He lY asked why he helped.

0:27:09 He said it was a tradition to help one another ln the famlly.

0:27:35 When they went to the Ghetto people were begging for help. They were kiYYing his hands. He could not help everybody who asked him.

0:28:15 He was desperate to helpe everyone but he couldn't. He didn't have enough space, and was still livlng with his parents.

0:29:13 He believes that even those who were payed for thelr help were noble human belngs.

0:29:55 The danger was equal for those who were payed, and those who weren't.

0:30:00 The Pflast was the next famlly he helped.

0:30:42 He dld not know them before the war.

0:31:45 He choYe to help theYe people over others becauYe they were acquainted wlth the ZolmanY.

0:31:55 He took a cart with two horses, and went to the Ghetto. The Ghetto Guard had been payed off. They dresYed as peaYants.

0:32:50 He took the family of three to his parents' house for three weeks, then to a hiding place.

0:33:30 Everyone pretended they did not know, which meant
0:33:54 he worked alone.

0:34:00 He felt that Jews were in an absolutely hopeless situation, worse than the Poles, because Poles had other Poles who would help them.

0:35:00 He is asked if he is particularly sensitive to seeing a helpless person.

0:35:52 He replies that if he hadn't been who he was he would not have done it.

0:36:02 He took absolutely no money.

The interviewer says partly what we want to learn is who
you are as a person.

0:37:05 He could not help himself; there was so much suffering.

0:38:04 He knew that in a few days he would be killed. He wanted to do anything possible to help.

0:38:50 He has to admit that even before the Nazis there were a lot of Poles who hated the Jews, and were glad to see them disappear from the towns.

When asked about his reaction to this, he says he was young
at the time and therefore did not pay

0:39:45 much attention to social movements.

0:40:20 One of the Poles had already been taken to Auschwitz during the liquidation of the Bochnia Ghetto.

0:40:45 He escaped, hiding in a coal train. He went to Mr. Wyrwa's parents' house wearing only a shirt.

0:41:27 He was absolutely emaciated physically. He slept next to his sick brother.

0:42:18 After several days' rest, he went to join the rest of his family in hiding.

0:43:09 Should the Germans have searched the house, all the occupants of the building would have perished.

0:44:00 The interviewer asks if other Christian Poles in Poland after the war attacked him for having helped the Jews. He said he did not tell anyone.

0:45:17 During the war he was active in the home army resistance, which was directed from London. He was suspected of being involved with the other army group, which consisted of communists and Jews. He was given the death sentence by his colleagues in the resistance, and went into hiding on his own.

0:47:10 He was very active in the underground, and therefore had another death sentence from the Gestapo. He took part in the release of political prisoners from Jall. He helped dissidents as well as Jews.

0:48:35 The interviewer asks if it was painful to remember afterward.

0:49:25 In the country where he hid his friends, the villagers did not know what he was doing. No one

0:50:24 knew beside the other rescuers.

0:50:43 The interviewer asks if he thought about it a lot after the war.

0:51:20 He met up several times with those he rescued, and everyone was busy with their own lives.

0:52:12 The Lleblich and Achleman were other families he helped--they all went back to Krakau after the war, then wanted to go to America or Israel.

0:54:50 One time the Gestapo came to his house, looking for Jews. He didn't have any at that time, and

0:55:10 could speak German well after taking it for three years in school.

0:56:20 The interviewer asks: "was the war time was the worst time of his life?"

0:56:54 Mr. Wyrwa worked in a Jall as a German-Polish translator for telephones.

0:57:35 He was friendly with the German Jall staff, hoping that if anything drastic happened to him, they would help.

0:58:10 He would invite a guard home so that everyone saw that they were friends.

0:58:41 He did business with them because he had to support his parents and get food for the Jews he was helping.

0:59:10 He had a German friend to whom he would give vodka in exchange for flour and staples, which he gave to those he rescued.

0:59:55 He was not afraid at all, apart from the time with Mr. Zoman on the way out of the Ghetto. 1:00:20 It was like a high-class adventure.

1:01:45 The interviewer asked, "Looking back, would you say it was a good time in your life?" 1:02:52 He says it felt good.

1:03:20 He married after the war and had a son.

1:04:20 He says no one in his family joined the communist party, and he himself was not communist.

1:05:30 After the Russians took over Poland he didn't like it. His son now earns \$35 per month.

1:06:16 He came here because he wanted to see America.

1:06:48 The Pfister's family has a cousin who lives in Germany, has a cousin who is a Rabbi in the USA. He helped him move here.

1:07:52 Solidarity was not established until after he left.

1:08:13 He would like to return to visit Poland.

1:09:15 He received a medal and was honored in the Israeli embassy in New York.

1:09:50 One of the interviewers is writing a book for children about rescuers. She asked him what he would like the children to know about that period.

02 He would like them to understand how difficult their times in Europe were. He wants them to appreciate good people, and believes that even if you endanger your own life, you should help those in need. He tells Polish proverbs meaning you can tell your friends when trouble arises.

1:13:35 Since then, he has had the opportunity to help newcomers to the US: helping them find jobs and housing, and giving them money. He feels that he is better off than they are.

The interviewer asks if he feels more comfortable

1 14:50 as a person because he has helped people, and if he learned something from himself or feels stronger because he acted.

1:16:10 The Poles who knew him in the States and who went back to Poland think very highly of him, and that he can do more than other people. He himself is very modest.

1:17:32 He is famous in Krakau for his good deeds here in America.

1:18:00 He is asked if he has changed as a person by what he did, and if he learned something from it.

1:18:55 He learned that it is very important to be a human being, and to remain one.

1:19:40 He is very religious (his family was too) and he agrees that this affects the way he thinks.

1:20:18 He respects his parents greatly because they taught him to love other people. That is what he feels should be emphasized with children.

1:21:55 He thought that after the war, because of what happened, that human beings in general would become better people. He was very disappointed. There are still wars with much killing. He noticed in Poland that everyone is concerned only with themselves, and in America too--in fact, everywhere.

1:24:30 He hopes that this book will serve to make some human beings better people.

1:25:03 He would like the next generations to think as he does.

1:25:40 The interviewer asks what he thinks of the title "They Risked Their Lives" for the book. He says it is good.

1:26:30 It reminds them that when the man who escaped from Auschwitz stayed with his parents, they were risking their own lives to hide him.

1:28:00 Because the desire to help came from inside, he could not ask for money--that was not why he did it.

1:30:00 When asked if he ever felt the people he helped owed him anything, he says he felt that he deserved recognition but did not want monetary recognition. He wanted appreciation and respect.

1:~0:55 He waa disappointed by the LiebliGha famiIy~ wh~ dld not even answer hls letter. But from others he received all the thanks and gratitude he deserved.

1:32:00 When asked if he would do it again, he said he hasn't changed at all when lt comes to human need for help.

1:34:00 He i8 dlsappolnted that he has not heard from the Lleblchs--not terrlbly so, but he ls sad. When asked why he thlnks they dldn't thank hlm, he says that they may have thought it was his duty to help them, whch he dld, and that was that.

1:36:30 Mr. Zolman wrote to the Lleblchs asking for a letter witnesslng that Mr. Wyrwa dld help them, and they gave the testlmony.

1:37:45 Interviewers ask for the Lieblchs' address in Brussels, since they are going there to interview more re~cuers.

1:38:24 He says he feels a little bitterness towards them, and that they owe him a little--maybe an invitatlion to Belgium for a week or two.