

Approximately 1995

LANOTA, Anna
Polish Documentation Project
Polish
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[Approximately 180 min]

SUMMARY

Anna Lanota (née **Rottenberg**) born in Łódź on January 11, 1915 comes from a religious Jewish family. Her mother descended from formerly affluent Jewish textile factory owners and her father came from an impoverished Jewish farmers' family. Ms. Lanota talks about growing up in Łódź, where she spoke Polish at home and attended an expensive Jewish school, which was known for its Zionist tendencies; she remembers spending summers with her father's relatives in the country, where she spoke Hebrew and enjoyed living close to nature. She recalls that her father's family was practicing the Chasidic religion; they formed a commune and tended land near the village of Skryhiczyn (near Dubienka), an area that was otherwise populated by Ukrainians. After completing High School, Ms. Lanota remembers moving to Warsaw where she studied psychology. She comments that in 1937 the general atmosphere at the Warsaw University was not anti-Semitic. Ms. Lanota talks about her affiliations with the communist movement: ZNMS [*The Independent Socialist Youth Organization*], and MK [*The Communist Youth*] while in college and remembers working for CENTOS [*Central Organization for the Care of Orphaned Children*] in Otwock, where she provided care for children with mental disabilities; she recalls working with Janusz Korczak [*real name: Henryk Goldszmit*]. Ms. Lanota talks in detail about fleeing from Warsaw after the outbreak of the war in 1939 and describes her march towards Skryhiczyn. She recalls her first encounter with the Soviet Army in Kowle and explains the difficulties she had in obtaining the proper identification papers due to the incompetence of the Soviet officials. She remembers working in the local orphanage alongside Ukrainians and Georgians and then moving to Lvov. She talks about finding further employment in the orphanage in Lvov and working with severely handicapped children. Ms. Lanota comments on being unaware of the conditions in the Jewish ghettos in the territory of Poland, since the Russian newspapers never disclosed all of the information. She describes the warm welcome given to the Germans by the local population when they liberated Lvov from the Soviets, since German war atrocities were not yet known. Though she personally didn't witness any German persecutions of Jews in Lvov, she recalls that an order to wear arm bands was issued. Ms. Lanota talks about her return to Warsaw via Cracow, and recalls hearing about deportations and German persecution of the Jews for the first time. She arrived in Warsaw in the fall of 1941 and wanted to walk in and join her closest family in the Ghetto, despite the warnings of her other relatives who lived on the Aryan side. She recalls her first impression of the Warsaw Ghetto and compares it to hell. Ms. Lanota talks about her talented brother, who used to design textile weaving patterns for a German businessman during the war. Through him, he learned of Hitler's plans for the Jews and shared his knowledge with the other Ghetto Jews; however they didn't want to believe that the holocaust was possible. Ms. Lanota remembers beginning her work in the Ghetto orphanage, which was sponsored by a rich Jew. She tried to forget the reality

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through her work. She was afraid of the Jews being dehumanized when driven by hunger and the extreme living conditions, which she describes in detail. In July 1942 Ms. Lanota's family was deported from the Ghetto; she learned that they were destined for death, as the news of death camps had reached the Ghetto through the rail workers. Ms. Lanota explains that she tried to warn the others and reiterates that the majority didn't want to believe the truth; they claimed that the death camps couldn't exist and were a mere German or Soviet fabrication. Ms. Lanota remembers that her cousin escaped the gas van; nobody believed his story and he was considered mentally unstable. Ms. Lanota speaks of witnessing the march of Korczak alongside his pupils to the Umschlagplatz on August 6. Encouraged by her college friend, she escaped from the Ghetto and found immediate help from a stranger, who was a PPS [*Polish Socialist Party*] member. Her friends and family found permanent lodgings for her and arranged for false identification papers. Ms. Lanota became involved in the underground working on behalf of the communists and helped to print and distribute the *Głos Warszawy* newspaper. She remembers joining the partisans at the end of 1942, and talks of blowing up trains and reclaiming food supplies from the train transports. As a result of an accident with a firearm, she was wounded and had to leave her unit. Shortly afterwards her fellow partisans were denounced by a local farmer and the whole unit was captured and killed. Ms. Lanota remembers her continued work for the underground when together with her husband she helped to repair damaged weapons and produced explosives. She explains the operation of the infamous Polish Hotel, which in her opinion served as a lure to expose Jews from their hiding. She adds that the Polish Hotel provided passports and travel papers only for the initial group of Jews; the following groups were killed. Ms. Lanota speaks of the Warsaw Uprising and comments on her husband's participation on behalf of the AL [*People's Army*] in the Uprising; she remembers his death. Because of her pregnancy, she did not personally take part in the fighting. While trying to leave Warsaw, she was stopped by *własowiec* [*a soldier of Andrei Andreyevich Vlasov army, which collaborated with the Germans*]; she managed to save her life by offering a bribe. Ms. Lanota gave birth to her child in Lublin and eventually settled in Warsaw after the war; her birthplace, Łódź evoked too many painful memories. She never thought of leaving to Israel but joined the Polish Communist Party instead. Ms. Lanota talks of her work as the head editor of "Przyjaciółka" magazine; she mentions being employed as a journalist and a psychologist. Although she knew about anti-Semitic incidents in Poland in 1956 and 1968, she never experienced any persecutions. Ms. Lanota comments that she met both good and bad Poles. Until this day she is trying to understand the Holocaust from the psychological point of view.

[The interview is relevant to Exhibitions]

Prepared by Agnieszka McClure 09/16/2010