

RG-50.226 #0006
BIRMAN, SONYA LEYBOVNA

- 1.00 Born Sept. 10, 1928 in Zhitomir. Father was a tailor. Two children.
- 1.02 At outbreak of war, went to relatives and tried to evacuate but had to return to Kotelnaya - a village near Zhitomer [about 20 km southeast of Zhitomer]. Germans had already arrived in area, and local administration had been established.
- 1.04 On August 17, 1941 mass shootings began. At first, only those over the age of 13 were chosen as victims. Younger children and their mothers initially spared. Sonya's parents shot. She was also at shooting site with parents, but she ran and managed to flee into woods. Went to live with grandmother nearby. Helped by local Ukrainians; they were essentially left unharmed.
- 1.11 12 Dec. 1941, second shooting took place. Their house was surrounded by police. Sonya escaped through back window which led to river. Her grandmother was an invalid and couldn't leave. Neighbor hid Sonya for the night, but out of fear refused to let her stay longer.
- 1.15 Wandered from village to village. Reached village of Garoeshovka where many women, children and old people who had not been shot were gathered. Stayed with this group in a wooden barracks - about 6 months. [At this point Sonya says she never talked about these terrible events to anyone in later years, not even to her children or to others who were with her at the time.]
- 1.18 Resumed her wandering, asking for food and lodging around the town of Andrushovka [about 40 km southeast of Zhitomir]. Met a woman member who gave a bread. Found out later that the woman was a partisan. Later stayed with a woman who took her in for six months. Did a lot of heavy household work. Woman didn't know that Sonya was Jewish, although some the neighbors suspected she was.
- 1.25 Soviet troops arrive in 1944. Many people in the village feared arrival of Soviet, but Sonya was joyful. She told a Jewish lieutenant that she was Jewish.
- 1.28 Sonya had sworn to herself that she would take revenge for the killing of her parents and grandmother. She drew up for Soviet troops a list of all the local police whose names she knew. Ten people arrested. There was a trial. 8 police were executed. 2 got 25 years imprisonment.
- 1.30 Sonya took part as witness.
- [Break]
- 2.00 Interviewer asks Sony why she had not talked about her experiences. She says she did tell her children, but not in great detail.

- 2.01 Interviewer asks about post-liberation events. Sony returned to Zhitomir and was called in by the NKVD.[Sonya loses train of thought and doesn't explain NKVD summons further.] She returns to Kotelnaya. Meets man who later becomes her husband.
- 2.05 After war didn't work. Was often ill. Interviewer asks about other Jews she might have known in Zhitomir during the war. She mentions some of them. Many Jews had been evacuated and returned after war.
- 2.10 Sonya says memories and experiences weigh on her. Interviewer asks about her brother who had been in army. In 1944 she received letter from him which had been held in local government office. She wrote him [he was stationed in Ryazan] and he was given leave to meet her.
- 2.15 One interviewer asks about pre-war life. She says pre-war life was happy. But war changed all that forever.
- 2.18 Another interviewer asks for details on the shooting of Jews in Kotelnaya. Sonya says only one German was present at the time. All the rest of the people who carried out the operation were local police.

END OF TAPE