

BALAIŠIENĖ, Ona
Lithuania Documentation Project
Lithuanian
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This interview was conducted with Ona Balaišienė, born in 1911, who lived in Anykščiai and worked in Debeikiai during WWII. She discusses renting out her family's home to Jewish families during summers before the war and names a few famous Lithuanian Jews (**Melnikas** and **Frenkelis**) who stayed at their house. She describes a little about the ghetto in Anykščiai and recalls how she brought milk for a mother in the ghetto but couldn't get through until the superintendent of the ghetto, whom she knew, let her in. She describes how a partisan turned her in and her husband was to be executed but that he was released by a man named Šulga. She mentions that people went to the ghetto to search for whatever the Jews left behind on their way to be executed and that the elder of a village nearby advised her husband to buy some Jewish furniture.

Box 1, Tape 1

[01:] 00:40:15 – [01:] 08:50:02
00:00 – 09:04

She introduces herself as Ona Balaišienė, née Sapkauskaitė, born in 1911 in Andrioniškis to a laborer and a laundress for the church; says that both of her parents were involved in illegal distribution of Lithuanian news under the Russian Empire and that her mother was arrested for her involvement; adds that her father had worked in the United States and that both of her parents died in 1918: her father was shot by the retreating Germans and her mother died of pneumonia.

[01:] 08:50:03 – [01:] 18:41:01
09:05 – 19:19

She talks about her and her siblings' lives from the day after her parents died until she got married; talks about the Jews who stayed at their home during summers, mentioning by name **Potrukas**, the son-in-law of **Frenkelis**, the owner of the Šiauliai tannery, and a photographer named **Melnikas**; confides that she and her husband expanded the house with the money they made but that they had to cover the windows after the Germans came to prevent it from being nationalized.

[01:] 18:41:02 – [01:] 28:21:16
19:20 – 29:24

She reports an incident to prove that the Germans wanted to nationalize their house and recounts how a neighbor who collaborated helped them out; recalls the name of one Jew from Anykščiai

called **Gelvonas**, the owner of a leather goods shop; recounts an incident in which she tried to bring milk to a Jewish woman who had just had a baby in the ghetto but a Lithuanian partisan from Čekoniai prevented her from entering; adds that the superintendent of the ghetto, **Balys Paulavičius**, whom she knew, let her through and even told her the number of the room where the woman was staying; says that Jews from the ghetto would come to drink water from their well; that one of them was a woman whom she had seen at the Debeikiai maternity hospital; says that this woman told her she was feeding the baby with whatever she had to eat herself since she did not have milk; says that she was so moved by the story that she gave away all the food she had; says that the partisan who refused her permission to enter the ghetto gave her in and because of that the Germans were going to execute her husband together with the Jews; explains that her husband understood the Germans talking among themselves because he had been in German captivity during the WWI; adds that **Klemansas Kiaušas** and a German language teacher named **Šluga** convinced the German authorities to spare her husband; explains that **Šluga** was an “perkalbėtoju” [*ambiguous term, possibly interpreter or interrogator.*]

[01:] 28:21:17 – [01:] 36:26:03
29:25 - 37:50

She recalls that a few years ago she met the partisan who gave her in but that he didn't want to talk about the past; recounts an incident when a German accidentally learned that her husband could speak German, and the very next day he received a call to work as a “perkalbėtoju” [*ambiguous term, possibly interpreter or interrogator*] but he refused; talks about a Jewish old man who would come to their well and always carried around a big book; says that once she asked what was written in the book, and he answered, “It is written in this book that while our blood is running in rivulets today, yours will run in wide rivers tomorrow”; says she remembers the impact of these words on her; explains that the Jews from the ghetto were not taken to be executed all at once, but in small groups every five days or so; says that first they took the young and that the rich were left for the end; adds that it was widely believed that they would be left alive, but that they were later were taken to Utena to be massacred; talks about her fear for her children's lives and her sleepless nights; describes the children's cries from the ghetto; says that Germans are “blood-suckers”.

Box 1, Tape 2

[02:] 00:40:01 – [02:] 10:13:02
00:34 – 10:30

She recalls how the wounded would be brought to the maternity hospital where she worked; explains that they were people fleeing Kaunas in the direction of Utena; says that among them were Jews and Russians, mostly former Soviet employees; describes the sight of a man with a hole in his head [*her eyes well up*]; says that some Jews were ordered to dig graves for themselves and were shot; notes that the history **should not be recorded**; says that it was as bad under the Russians as it was under the Germans; discusses the mass deportations of Lithuanians.

[02:] 10:13:03 – [02:] 18:47:11
10:31 – 19:27

[The interviewee is told that she is the only one who is known to have entered the ghetto.] She explains that the Jews were locked up in the summer house that belonged to **Karka**, who was from Panevėžys; mentions that **Kapliauskas** and **Klemcickas** were there; says that women and children slept under the roof while the men slept under the sky; says she thinks that the Jews stayed there for about two months; claims to not have known that they would be shot; says that in the beginning people thought that the Russians would come back and the Jews would be free because there were Russian planes flying over and bombing surrounding villages; states that they only understood the Jews would be shot after the first group of Jews were taken away from the ghetto; adds that she then had a nervous breakdown and her husband took her to a property in the forest; explains that they moved to the forest so that they would not have to see and hear what was going on, otherwise she would have given away her last meal and her family would have been executed, too; says that the Jews were taken to be executed in the forest behind the statue of Biliūnas; states that she did not see them being led because she and her husband would close all the windows and hide whenever they saw the partisans approaching; talks about how difficult it was to see *[her eyes well up]*; claims that she did not see the Jews being tortured.

[02:] 18:47:12 – [02:] 27:04:12
19:27 – 28:03

She recalls that one Jew came over to her house and asked her to relay a plea to a Lithuanian family in whose garden he had buried all his family's treasures; says that he wanted them to come and bring him and his family at least some water; states that she was afraid to relay this message but that her husband eventually did and was rudely turned down; says that the Jews were mostly walking to the execution site, while some were taken in a cart *[earlier she mentioned that she did not see them being taken to the execution site]*; recounts how after they were all massacred, people from the town went to the ghetto to look for whatever they left behind; says that the superintendent of the ghetto was a very good man and that he was later sentenced to jail for collaborating with the Germans; explains that he was ordered to work in the ghetto because he had just returned from the army.

[02:] 27:04:13 – [02:] 36:24:10
28:04 – 37:48

She recounts how a nearby village elder came over to her husband, who was a shoemaker, to fix his shoes and mentioned that there was some Jewish furniture still left unsold and suggested her husband should go and take a look at it; says that some Jewish houses were given to the partisans and that she does not know what happened to the others; claims that she did not know any of the partisans, since her husband, who lived through WWI, told her to stay at home and try not to hear or see anything; when asked what memory is the most terrifying for her, she responds that it is the sounds of children screaming at night.