

TIESNIESIENĖ, Marytė
Lithuania Documentation Project
Lithuanian
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Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Marytė Tiesnienė, born in 1924 and a local Jew of Pašvitiniai, describes her experiences living in a ghetto and being saved by a killer. She talks about her family's various relocations after her town was burnt down and describes living in the Žagarės ghetto. She discusses the day when all of the Jews were taken into a square, beaten over the head, and herded into trucks to be shot, and how she was saved by an old Lithuanian friend who then brought her to a family she had previously worked for and whose father had killed other Jews. She describes the lengths the family went to save her, including finding a woman who agreed to testify to being her non-Jewish mother. She also talks about the fact that the same man, **Liutikas**, who saved her, killed her brother later, and she ruminates over whether he was a good human being or not.

[01:] 00:21:22 – [01:] 06:19:11

She introduces herself as Marė Šneiderytė, born in Pašvitiniai in 1924; talks about her parents' jobs—her father sold linen, vegetables, etc., and her mother sold the milk from their cows; says that there were only about 10–12 local Jewish families; explains that there was a rabbi but no Jewish school; remembers the names of some of the Jewish families: **Dubovičius**, **Liurijas**, **Ryvisas**, **Dorfanas**; explains that before the war a large part of the Pašvitiniai town burned down, including her house, and her family went to live with fellow Jewish neighbors; explains that about two months after the start of the war when the Germans came, all Jews were gathered to live in a store in Pašvitiniai; says the Germans proclaimed that since one German had been killed, 100 Jews had to be killed in retaliation; reminisces visiting the store last year (2000) with her children; remembers later being brought to the Žagarės ghetto; describes life there—that there was security everywhere, that there were set times when Jews could shop, that Jews had to wear two yellow stars (one on their front and one on their back); explains that the local Jews lived under slightly better circumstances than those brought in after the fire.

[01:] 06:19:12 – [01:] 11:52:16

She talks about how relations between the locals and the Jews changed after the beginning of the war, that the locals no longer treated the Jews like regular people; remembers that after the fire, her family lived with the **Stobiju** family, and then lived for a few weeks with the **Kristonavičių** family, then were taken to the store, and later to the Žagarės ghetto; remembers having to clean the headquarters of those in charge; remembers that the same people who forced her to work were those with whom she had attended dances a few years earlier; explains that it was hard for her to understand the abrupt change in treatment that she received from them; remembers the young men who would take her dancing, who she later saw wearing uniforms: **Tiltinejanis**

[Tiltenujanis], Tomkevičius, Dumša [Dumšra]; describes the uniforms they wore as grey and of good quality; mentions that her family stayed in the store for about two months, from June to August; describes the store the Jews were crowded into; explains that sleeping materials were brought in, and that local people (Lithuanians, others) brought them food; says that the people in charge of rounding up the Jews were “white stripers”; says that no Jews were killed in Pašvitiniai but all of their belongings were taken away (although not her family’s, since they were destroyed in the fire).

[01:] 11:52:17 – [01:] 14:51:00

She talks about the day when all of the Jews in the Žygarės ghetto were brought into a gated square; explains how all of the Jews were surrounded by “white stripers;” says that one, **Bakšys**, said a prayer; says that all of the “white stripers” were drunk and began to shoot; remembers that her mother’s leg was shot and remembers how she took off her scarf and wrapped her mother’s wound; says that they ordered everyone to lie on the ground and hit their heads with sticks; explains that they then took everyone and forced them into trucks that drove them to trenches, where the Jews were forced to take off their clothing and were shot; explains that the Jews killed were from Žagarės, Pašvitiniai, Linkuva, Joniškės, and Žeimelio; says that about 4,000 Jews were killed.

[01:] 14:51:01 – [01:] 25:13:21

She starts to talk about the **Liutikas** family—the family that saved her; talks about one day when all of the young Jewish men, including her brother, were taken to a synagogue, and after a few days they started being killed, but her brother was able to convince them that he was not Jewish—he took one of his friends’ bodies right after he was shot and threw him into a trench; says her brother told the “white stripers” that he was an orphan and was only raised by a Jewish family; explains that her brother convinced them he would be useful as a worker, so the **Liutikas** family let him work in their garden for a few weeks; explains that **Liutikas** was the chief policeman’s deputy; says that her brother later sent **Liutikas**’ wife to the ghetto with a note to ask if she (Tiesnienė) could work as well; says that **Liutikienė** started coming regularly to take her from the ghetto and to use her to help around the house, and that she (Tiesnienė) pleased her; talks about her Lithuanian friend, **Beliackas**, who had taken her dancing before the problems between the Lithuanians and the Jews, and whom she saw one day outside of the ghetto; explains that he told her that they were going to take all of the Jews to work the next day but that he would come during the night and take her to his father’s farm; says that she refused to go, and that she was scared to tell her family because she did not want to raise panic; says that **Beliackas** did come during the night but she did not go, not knowing what was really going to happen; explains that later, when she was lying on the ground of the square, **Beliackas** found her and took her over to a lieutenant and told him that she was not Jewish, but an orphan raised by a Jewish family; explains that the lieutenant asked her if she knew any (Catholic) prayers, and she did know some because she attended a Lithuanian school where they said daily prayers; explains that **Beliackas** took her to the **Liutikas** family, and they agreed to take her in; explains that others in the town started getting upset that she was living with them, so she was put in a locked, guarded room for a week, during which time the **Liutikas** family brought her bedding and food; says that they were able to arrange for her to sit in a classroom during the daytime and only sleep

in the guarded room; explains that one day, a priest named Father **Kavaliauskas** came to teach theology and other kids in the room complained that there was a Jewish girl in the room; explains that he took her aside and asked her what she was doing there and she told him everything; says that he told her to wait there until nighttime; says that he returned that night with cake and with **Liutikas**; says that the priest called another priest in Pašvitiniai and they were able to find a woman (**Navickienė**) in the town who agreed to pretend to be her mother; talks about the trial that followed, and that **Navickienė** came, as did another woman, **Beleckienė**, who testified that she was the midwife who delivered her; explains that this is how they saved her life.

[01:] 25:13:22 – [01:] 36:31:06

She mentions that she still visited her fake mother until she died, and that her daughter, **Navickaitė**, still lives in Vilnius; explains that she stayed with the **Liutikas** family, and that her brother also stayed there; remembers again that the same **Liutikas** who saved her was also the one who shot her brother's friend; remembers that when her brother had finished his tasks, **Liutikas** sent for two soldiers who shot her brother; remembers that **Liutikas** was later tried and imprisoned; remembers being stopped when she tried to go near him, and that she never saw him again; says that when he left prison and returned, he was shot, probably by a new rebel group; says that to her, **Liutikas** was a good person; remembers hearing shots outside during the war, and **Liutikas** telling her that she was safe; exclaims that she understands how unfathomable her story sounds; says that she knew her brother was going to be shot, that they said goodbye; explains that her brother had a wound that would not heal; says that it is hard for her to decide whether **Liutikas** was good or not—he saved one but killed others; explains that she was once invited to Šauliai to speak about him, and that she said she thought **Liutikas** was good, but the people there decided that his bad deeds outweighed his good ones; says that she does not know how her children understand everything, and that they most likely do not understand; mentions that the house in which she lived in the ghetto belonged to the **Glasas** family; again remembers the day in the square, and mentions that there were about six Germans and all of the rest of those involved were Lithuanians; says that the chief was **Kolokša**; mentions that her father fled to Kaunas, where he was later shot; again remembers when she saw her mother shot in the leg; remembers saying her goodbyes to her mother, and her mother pleading to **Beliackas** just to save her daughter.