

DREVINSKIENĖ, Regina
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Tape 1 of 1

In this interview, Regina Drevinskienė, a resident of Biržai since 1938, discusses Jewish life in the city before the war and how it changed under the Nazi regime in Lithuania in 1941. She discusses her family's warm relations with their Jewish neighbors. She recalls how her family was forced to move out of their house because it was in the ghetto. She also recounts many details of the ghetto, since she lived nearby and witnessed Jews being rounded-up into the synagogue and marched away to be shot. She discusses in great detail what became of the Jews' houses and belongings. Drevinskienė talks about the peculiar arrival of a group of foreign rabbi apprentices, who appeared in Biržai after the German occupation, before the ghetto was established. Although she stresses the good relations of residents with Jews, she also admits to intolerance existing even during the interwar period, focusing on acts of vandalism against Jews and the "terrible days." She provides information on a few hidden Jewish children who were hidden and raised by Lithuanian families and survived the Holocaust.

[22:] 27:53:00 – [22:] 36:26:01

She introduces herself as born in 1927, in Braškių village in the Biržų district; talks about moving to Biržai before the war in 1938; mentions her education; provides statistics about the prewar Jewish population in Biržai; mentions that some Jews fled to the Soviet Union in 1941; explains what sources she has gathered her information from, and that she personally saw a number of passports belonging to Jews removed from the archive after the war; discusses Jewish life in Biržai before the war, their notable presence in the city, and their good relations with the other residents of the city; describes the exact location where she lived and mentions her Jewish neighbors, **Racemoriai [Racimoriai]** and Orka; describes the restrictions put on Jews, such as denying them work, banning from walking on sidewalks, and inscribing the letter "J" on their doors; recalls her mother hiding potatoes in the river for the starving Orka family; describes how her family was the last to move out of their house in the ghetto; recalls a conversation her father had with the captain of the guards upon being pressured to move out of their house; mentions how her family, along with the **Batvyniai** family, **Krikščiūnienė** and **Judeikienė** swapped houses with the **Shapiros [Šapyrai]**, who were Jewish dentists; describes how the Jews were rounded up into the synagogue for three days and the ghetto was left empty; enumerates the exact streets and boundaries of the ghetto, where the Jews lived for two weeks, mentioning the heavy security; describes the guards of the ghetto, the "baltaraiščiai" ("white stripers"), who were local Lithuanians dressed in civilian clothes with white bands; explains that the captain of the guards was a German who had a Lithuanian interpreter to translate his orders.

[22:] 36:26:02 – [22:] 45:31:15

She talks about the gender and roles of the Jews who were rounded up in the synagogue, discussing how Jewish men had to dig pits every morning while the women, children and elderly remained in the synagogue; remembers seeing men leaving the synagogue with shovels, and then on the last day without shovels; comments on the common knowledge of the town that the Jews were digging two large trenches; describes hearing the machine guns on the day of the shooting; describes the order in which the Jews were marched out to be shot—the men first, in the morning, and then the others in the afternoon; describes how her family stood on the sidewalk to bid farewell to the Jews who marched by on their way to be shot; mentions the names **Saferaitė** and **Racemoriai**; remembers witnessing two old women fall while being marched through the street and get beaten by a “white striper”; discusses in detail the apparel of the Jews—that many were dressed warmly since they did not know their fate; comments on whether people carried their things with them; remembers a policeman, whose duty it was to guard the ghetto the night after the shooting, telling her family that the Jews collected treasures from out of the toilets before they were forced to leave; talks about where the Jews had hidden their treasures in homes and in the synagogue; describes returning to their original house immediately; discusses what items were taken away and which ones were left; talks about the fate of **Belickis** who was taken to **Užušilių** forest and shot even before the mass shootings; remembers seeing a mother and son break into **Belickis’** house while the shooting of the Jews was still in progress; explains how all of the valuables of the Jews that remained in the houses were taken to the middle school where they were sold; comments again on the mother and son who went into **Belickis’** house to loot it; remembers an incident in which German soldiers threw clothes out of the second story of the school and a group of people came by to gather them; questions how people could possibly use such things, knowing where they came from.

[22:] 45:31:16 – [22:] 53:03:00

She specifies that Lithuanian “white stripers,” and not German soldiers, led the Jews to the place of shooting; describes the weather that day, linking it to the morbid incidents; comments again on the order in which groups of Jews were taken to be shot focusing on the sick, who were driven on trucks; describes hearing the shots; describes the boiling of blood in the trenches; mentions **Kazeliūnas**, a coworker of her father’s at the hospital, and talks about their duties of covering the bodies in the mass graves with lime and sawdust; describes the smell that spread throughout the area; describes her father’s psychological state after coming home from covering the bodies; mentions that her mother and **Judeikienė** both fainted upon hearing the shots; provides the exact statistics of how many Jews were shot in the Biržas region (5,994), mentioning that the Pasvalis region belonged to Biržas at the time; mentions the statistics of other Jews who were deported to Germany; explains how the gravesite was guarded after the shooting; talks about how inmates were taken from a forced labor camp in Geidžiūnai in order to bury the Jews’ bodies; mentions collecting oral histories of the inmates of Geidžiūnai; recounts other people’s recollections of objects they saw surrounding the gravesite; mentions that later people dug up the graves in search of gold; explains that in 1955 a monument was erected and the site preserved by the workers of a thread factory; explains that she did not go by the gravesite; talks about locals who moved into the Jewish houses once they were empty and how people who moved to the city from the villages occupied the houses; debates whether anyone’s

standard of living improved from taking Jewish belongings; comments on how many people left abroad having gathered the Jews' valuables.

[22:] 53:03:01 – [23:] 00:27:20

She talks again about her family's relationship with the Jews in her neighborhood before the war; describes how Orka would visit them, before the ghetto was created to listen to the radio and discuss how the front was approaching; talks about Orka, his family and his profession; mentions seeing his family being taken away to be shot; discusses an interesting fact, that when the Germans took over, a group of rabbi apprentices from Romania appeared in the city; discusses how, before the enforcement of the ghetto, but already during the German occupation, the group of rabbis would go to the synagogue every day; focuses on their appearances; gives a detailed description of the apparel of Jewish men as they were marched out to dig and then later be shot, explaining that she could not recognize the rabbi among them; tries to calculate the number of days the men dug the trenches providing information on the dimensions of the trenches that they dug; decides that the digging must have lasted three to four days.

[23:] 00:27:21 – [23:] 09:45:24

She returns to her family's conversation with the police officer the night after the shootings, focusing on his Lithuanian police uniform; explains that the "white strippers," and not uniformed policemen, guarded the ghetto while the Jews lived in it; mentions an incident in which her Jewish neighbor Orka went out onto the sidewalk, against all regulations, to buy apples from a woman for his sick child when, suddenly, a youth kicked him in the chest; discusses how she remembers these incidents like a painting before her eyes, and how difficult it is to talk about them; mentions speaking with **Braškiene**, and how others who moved out of the ghetto no longer remember anything; describes the large collection of literature in the Shapiro household, and describes burying all of it near the river in order to hide it; enumerates the objects that she kept of the Shapiro's to preserve their memory and what she did with these objects; talks about a photograph of **Honenka Zachs [Honenka Zaks]**; mentions the **Pėsenai** family, who owned an ink-shop; mentions all of her Jewish neighbors and their common fate; describes the state of their house when they returned to it; remembers the books that were there and are now buried under the river because the river rose; talks about how all of the Jew's furniture and clothes had been taken out and how only prayer books and a torah were left.

[23:] 09:45:25 – [23:] 19:22:00

She remembers how the rabbi's wife would talk with her mother but not enter the house; describes the good relationships of the Jews with the other residents of the city; describes the vandalism that was committed against Jews during Smetona's presidency (in the interwar period), such as pouring hot asphalt on the windows and doors of stores belonging to Jews; admits to there being an overall intolerance toward Jews; talks about the "terrible days" for Jews; gives an interpretation that people's jealousy served as a motive for committing acts of vandalism, because Jews were smarter, friendly, and had a strong community; comments on how Jews solved all their problems amongst themselves, and that a drunk or belligerent Jew was unheard of; *[silence until interview resumes]*.

[23:] 19:22:01 – [23:] 21:51:01

She returns to the topic of the young foreign rabbis who frequented the synagogue; explains that they appeared in Biržai immediately after the German occupation; talks about the inscribing of “Juden” on Jews’ doors and attaching the Star of David to people’s clothes; comments on her understanding of this as the segregation of the Jews; mentions that the rabbi apprentices came and resided at the house of the rabbi when the process of segregation was going on; speculates on the fates of the rabbis—that they probably left the country before the ghetto was established; mentions that one rabbi had returned, and recommends him as a reference.

[23:] 21:51:02 – [23:] 29:06:07

She responds to the question of whether anyone survived by recounting an episode in which a Jewish man climbed out of the mass-grave at night, walked into Rinkuškių town and knocked on a window that happened to be of the house where those who had shot the Jews were celebrating, so he was seized again, taken back to the mass-grave, and shot; mentions the name **Pasvalytė** as someone who succeeded in running away; remembers an episode in which a Jewish mother abandoned her child near a factory, who was found later by a factory worker who adopted the little girl as his own; comments on how the girl still does not know her own biography; talks about the girl’s fate, that she has a Lithuanian name, and wonders whether she knows about her origins or not; discusses how much the hidden child loved her foster-father; *[silence until interview resumes]*.

[23:] 29:06:08 – [23:] 34:54:00

[Leafs through materials which she had gathered in search of the last names of a Jewish girl and the Lithuanian woman who fostered her]; she discusses the history of Elena **Nosova**, a Jewish woman who now lives in Klaipėda, whose mother, when fleeing to the Soviet Union, gave her to **Petronelė Dovydonienė** to raise along with her own son until the daughter was 14 years old; explains that the Jewish mother returned for her daughter after 14 years and moved with her to Klaipėda, but then later left for Israel while the daughter remained; explains that she gathered these oral histories herself, and how she knew these people; discusses how she knew during the war that a Jewish girl was raised as a hidden child; recalls a conversation in which **Dovydonienė** described to her how she accepted the task of raising the Jewish girl along with her own son; talks about how the girl’s mother fled to the Soviet Union and then came back to Biržai after the war; explains how once **Dovydonienė** died, the girl was raised by her foster-brother until her own mother came back; mentions again that the mother left for Israel, while the girl remained in Klaipėda to raise her own family.