

RAILA, Algirdas
Lithuania Documentation Project
Lithuanian
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Tape 1, Box 1

In this interview, Algirdas Raila discusses the beginning of the war in Kedainiai as he remembers it from a nine-year-old child's perspective. He provides information on the Jewish population for whom he carried milk as a child. He vividly recalls the first days of the war and the establishment of the Smilgos ghetto. He describes in great detail the day of the mass shooting of Jews when he witnessed a column of Jews march to the shooting site. He discusses in great detail exploring the shooting site the following morning and exploring the empty ghetto. Raila also discusses the various labor camps for Jews, Lithuanians, and Russian prisoners in the area, two of which were installed on his family's land. He talks about his family's interactions with the workers in these camps and their mysterious disappearance. He discusses exploring the barracks once they were empty.

[09:] 14:54:00 – [09:] 23:00:23

He introduces himself as born in 1931 in Pasmilgis, a village in the city of Kedainiai; discusses how Pasmilgis is on the outskirts of Kedainiai and is considered to be part of the city; explains that he started going to school in the city when he was six; talks about the large Jewish population in Kedainiai before the war, which was concentrated around Smilgos and Taikos street; mentions the poor living conditions of Jews and their professions; mentions his neighbor, a Jewish farmer named **Benselis**; discusses selling milk to Jews as a little boy; gives his impression that Kedainiai was a predominantly Jewish city; mentions Jewish cucumber growers near **Nevėžis**; discusses other crafts and professions of Jews; discusses the beginning of the war, focusing on how he smoked cigarettes at the time; talks about the first days of the war, mentioning that his family temporarily moved to Pelėdnagai because an airport was being built near their house; explains how, upon hearing about the outbreak of war, he and his father drove back to their homestead; remembers driving down **Dotnuva** road where he saw many parked wooden planes; describes seeing burned corpses of Russian soldiers on Kaunas street; talks about how he rarely carried milk to Jews once the Nazis were in power; talks about the restrictions placed upon Jews, including the Star of David sewn to their clothes and a ban on walking on sidewalks; remembers how he no longer carried milk into the ghetto once fences were erected around Smilga street; specifies that the ghetto was not built immediately upon the German takeover; does not remember how long the Jews lived in the ghetto; explains that from the Smilga ghetto the Jews were rounded and taken to the **Leibeno** Manor horse stables before being shot.

[09:] 23:00:24 – [09:] 33:14:12

He talks about rumors that a mass shooting of Jews would occur because Russian prisoners were digging a large trench nearby under the supervision of Lithuanians; explains that he did not witness the security around the horse stables; discusses the length of time it took to dig the trench; remembers the day of the shooting when two *baltaraiščiai* (“white-strippers”) warned his family not to go outside because there would be shootings; explained that the two men remained in order to guard the path that led to the shooting site; describes hearing rounds of shots in the afternoon, and how he later in the evening requested permission to go to his uncle’s house in order to better see how the last wave of Jews was shot; describes in great detail seeing from a couple hundred meters distance a column of Jews, guarded on both sides, snake its way to the place of shooting; tries to figure out how many people were in that column; describes how they were lined up in fours; explains that the guards were Germans but remembers that his father told him that there were also “white-strippers” present and that the Germans were at the end of the column with dogs; remembers that the column was silent as it moved to the shooting site; describes hearing the shooting, but not actually seeing it; [*silence as he tries to remember what kind of weapons were used*] remembers that his father told him that there were machine-guns, but mostly hand-guns; speculates that shooting lasted about a half hour; focuses on the length of time it took to line up the Jews in front of the trench, undress them and then shoot them; describes the cries of women that he heard; mentions seeing children but does not remember their voices; remembers an episode in which a Jewish girl tried to hide in a ditch, but later heard that she was found and killed.

[09:] 33:14:13 – [09:] 40:41:10

He explains that he and his brother, along with other youths went to his uncle’s house for a better view of the events; focuses on the fact that no adults went with them; explains that the shooting ended when it got dark but that they stayed in the house until the morning; describes going to the shooting site the following day; describes the site in detail, focusing on the newly piled earth as though it was moving; describes the bloodstains in front of the trench and the many Jewish leather prayer books scattered around the grave site [*holds hand up to forehead demonstrating how Jews hold the prayer books when praying*]; mentions the dividing up of clothing among the “white-strippers”; provides information on the dimensions of the trench; describes other objects that he saw around the site, focusing on German medals (emblems from a German uniform); mentions hearing about an episode in which a Jew tried to escape to Pakriaušė while shooting-off two pistols, but was killed; mentions hearing about another episode in which a Jewish women tried to pull a German soldier with her into the mass grave; explains that the resulting military metals were a testimony of this struggle from which the soldier emerged hardly alive; explains that there were no clothes left on the site; recounts touching and observing the leather prayer books with curiosity but not taking anything because his father warned him against it; specifies that his father was not there with them, reiterating that adults did not go near the site since their conscience did not allow them to; talks about who he brought milk to when there were no more Jews left, mentioning the name **Kubilius**, the town mayor.

[09:] 40:41:11 – [09:] 45:48:15

He talks about what became of the empty Jewish houses in Kedainiai; recounts exploring the empty ghetto with other children once the Jews were already in the horse stables; describes in

detail his impressions of the poverty and ruinous state of the houses; focuses on the gloomy, eerie mood, and describes seeing a large kettle pot; explains that everything of worth had already been taken either by the Jews themselves or by the “white-strippers”; talks about other empty houses that he walked through, emphasizing the chaotic appearance of the house, with the objects strewn everywhere; wonders how long the houses remained empty before people began to gradually move into them; discusses how people improved their standards of living by appropriating Jewish belongings; recalls that his father explained that most “white-strippers” had come from Janušava but also mentions that there were plenty of local “white-strippers” who participated; *[silence until the interview resumes]*.

[09:] 45:48:16 – [09:] 54:44:20

He talks about how upon returning to their homestead in Pasmilgė, his family found two work camps installed on their fields—one for Lithuanians and one for Jews (which existed until 1944); explains that many healthy Jews were kept alive for the building and amelioration of airports; describes how the workers from these camps would come to their house and pay his mother for food that she would cook for them; explains that the Jewish workers were mostly locals and that toward the end of the war they were driven away somewhere; describes the fences around the labor camp; focuses on the fact that the Jewish camp was doubly secured and more crowded; describes the barracks and the crowded conditions in which the Jewish prisoners lived; explains that certain German supervisors allowed them to come and ask for food despite the heavy security; describes the appearance and apparel of the Jewish women who came to ask for food; debates whether or not they had the Star of David sewn to their civilian clothes; decides that they did; talks about going into the barracks once the Jews were driven away at the end of the war; describes finding a violin that he took; describes the piles of clothes he saw in the empty barracks; explains that the Jews, before being driven away, buried their valuable treasures in a trash pit and after the war came back to unearth them and then took them away; explains that the concentration camp was established in 1943 and existed for about a year; discusses how the Russian machinery for cement and construction was already standing on their land; explains that that was the reason the field was turned into a work camp; recounts in greater detail how he found the violin in the barracks; mentions that there was no bow and that he no longer owns it; *[silence until interview resumes]*.

[09:] 54:44:21 – [10:] 01:40:14

He talks about Russian prisoners and how their work camp was located near **Sadauskas’** and **Radmonas’** property; describes how German soldiers abused the Russian prisoners and how his family would bring food to the prisoners; explains that the prisoners would always pass by his house on their way to work; describes how the German soldiers tortured the prisoners by indiscriminately stabbing them with bayonets while the prisoners dove for food that his family threw over the fence; describes the skeletal appearance of the prisoners; describes the cruelty of some German guards and describes the fairness of other guards who would equally distribute the food that they gave; explains that his family would always give bread and potatoes to the Russians when they could afford to; returns to the episode in which Jews were brought to the horse stables and how he did not witness that happen; mentions that “white-strippers” never spoke to him directly but that he learned of incidents by overhearing conversations his father had with

his mother; *[silence until interview cuts and resumes]*; returns to the Soviet prisoner work camp; focuses on the fact that he does not know the fates of the Russian prisoners, only that they all disappeared and were certainly not shot on the spot; explains that the German administration took down the fences and barracks of the camps that were on his family's land.

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