

BALSEVIČIUS, Vladas  
Lithuania Documentation Project  
Lithuanian  
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Tape 1 of 1

In this interview, Vladas Balsevičius discusses his memories of the Nazi regime in Kedainiai, Lithuania from a nine-year-old child's perspective. He describes in detail witnessing a large number of Jews move out of the ghetto into nearby horsestables, where they were forced to live until they were shot into a mass-grave that was dug by Russian prisoners. He describes the Smilgos ghetto in great detail and the restrictions put on Jews at the outbreak of the war. He recalls exploring the empty ghetto and the site of the mass-grave after the shooting. He vividly recounts hearing the shots and later seeing the corpses when the grave was uncovered after the war. Balsevicius goes on to discuss the fates of the empty Jewish houses, recounting how his own family received a Jewish blacksmith's house. He also talks about the good relations between Lithuanians and Jews before the war.

[10:]02:13:17

*[The name "Vladas Grachauskas" as written on the slate is incorrect. The informant's name should be written as "Vladas Balsevičius"]*

[10:]02:14:14 – [10:]09:33:08

He introduces himself as born in 1932 in Kedainiai; talks about his childhood in the city, that he was nine years old when the war began; discusses the large Jewish population in Kedainiai before the war, mentioning that there were five sinagogues, two of which remain; discusses having Jewish playmates, but going to school separately; remembers two Jewish sisters who owned a manufacturing store and who convinced him to buy a berret that was too big for him; explains witnessing the process by which about 3,000 Jews were forced from the ghetto to the horse stables; explains that the Germans tricked the Jews into believing that they were going to be transported to the holy land and therefore should bring as many valuable belongings as they could carry with them when they were forced to leave the ghetto, but instead the Jews were brought to the horsestables while a trench was dug, and then later shot; mentions the conditions in the horestable—that there was no food or water; explains hearing that the Jews were separated according to gender-- the women and children into the horse stables and the men into the granary; describes how the Jewish sisters took turns carrying their belongings with them; explains that uniformed German gendarmes were forcing the Jews to move out; discusses how nobody believed that the Jews would be shot; recounts an episode a week after the outbreak of the war, when he, along with some Jewish boys, was standing in line for bread at a bakery and a german soldier came by and threw the jewish children out of the line, not allowing them to buy bread; explains that the Jewish children stood-out from the others because of their darker features; mentions a sign that was hung on the bathhouse that forbid Jews entrance.

[10:]09:33:09 – [10:]17:34:21

He talks about how the ghetto was established; discusses the security around the ghetto--that both Germans and *baltaraiščiai* (tr. "white-strippers") guarded it with weapons; enumerates the streets and boundaries of the ghetto; talks about how he snuck into the ghetto in search of skates while the Jews were being shot; describes searching for the skates in great detail and finding multiple pairs; explains how Jews from all over the region had been brought to that ghetto and discusses their living conditions; describes other items in the houses, such as clothes, Stars of David and chickens; mentions that he went exploring with friends [*sighs, brief silence*]; explains that he did not go near the horsestables; recounts how a week after the shooting, they explored the site of the shooting out of curiosity; describes what he saw focusing on the bloody ground and pacifiers scattered around the area; describes the dimentions of the ditch; talks about how far away from the shooting place he lived and describes hearing the cries of people as they were herded to the shooting site and the shots; describes the mood of confusion amongst the people, focusing on the fact that once the shooting began, the cries could no longer be heard; explains that toward the end only single shots were heard [*points his hand like a gun and imitates the sound of a rifle*]; explains how long the shooting lasted, mentioning that the women and children were the last to be shot because their corpses were on top when the graves were later uncovered; describes in great detail how the bodies were thrown together once the grave was unearthed, which he witnessed when he was hearing cows near the airport; returns to describing the sound of the shooting from machine guns until the very end when only individual gunshots were heard.

[10:]17:34:22 – [10:]25:33:05

He talks about how people were allowed to move into the empty Jewish houses; discusses how his own family received a house that formerly belonged to a Jewish blacksmith name **Irša** [**Irsha**]; describes the process by which a committee assigned houses—that they would walk around the city offering empty houses, and that his father requested the blacksmith's house since he himself was a blacksmith; explains that after the war everything was made communal; talks about his father's relations with the Jewish blacksmith **Irša** before the war; describes the wretched state of the house when they moved in focusing on the trash, lice and lack of furniture; describes what remained of **Irša's** smithy; mentions hearing rumors that those who shot the Jews divided the Jews' belongings amongst themselves; mentions the name of a "white-striper" Grahauskas who witnessed the shooting and revealed to him names of other "white-strippers" such as **Griūnas** [**Kariūnas, Gariūnas**]; comments on discussing these themes with Grahauskas; describes again the line of Jews from the ghetto to the horestables; reiterates recognizing the two Jewish sisters in the line who convinced his mother to buy him a berret; lists the names of other Jews he recognized—**Gela, Lemke, Tsodika, Ronderis, Monas**, and how many horses each of these people had; discusses the good relations between Lithuanians and Jews before the war, focusing on the edicate of business with them—that if one bought something from a Jew without having enough money, one could pay him back later; mentions that Jews got along well with his father [*silence until interview cuts and resumes*].

[10:]25:33:06 - [10:]30:35:19

He explains that Russian prisoners of war dug the trench for the mass grave; mentions how at one point, the prisoners went on strike believing that they were digging the grave for themselves;

mentions that the digging lasted a week and that his father in law witnessed it because he lived nearby; specifies that he witnessed the uncovered grave in the summer of 1944; explains that he does not know why it was uncovered but that there was some kind of committee involved; repeats the dimensions of the trench; describes how the area of the mass-grave looked throughout the war -- that it was a level field with grass growing on it; talks about the fence that was put around the area, the trees that were planted and a monument erected in 1955; tells a humorous anecdote about why he remembers the fence so well, because after leading his fiance's home, he walked near the site late at night and dogs attacked him, so he ran to the fence, but his clothes got caught in the fence.

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