

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Anelė Delkienė

RG-50.473*0157

Part 1 English

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00:29 Interviewer: First of all I would like to ask you to introduce yourself, what is your name?

00:35 Interviewee: My name is Lidia, uh, Sokolova. But I married Titishkis, Titishkeni. Born in the year 1929, on September 18. And when the war started in 1939, I was not yet -- it started on September 1 between Germany and Poland -- I was not yet 10.

1:09 Interviewer: Please tell me where were you born?

1:12 Interviewee: I was born in Druskininkai. And my family, my ancestors -- when it was decided to build a resort in Druskininkai, they were called up here for a compulsory military service by the CR (Central Rada) as good foremen -- came here to build a resort in 1837. And since then the family expanded, there are many branches in this family but when they came here they all had 'golden hands' and many houses, even a church, were built by them, with their hands. And [they] could make furniture, build houses and my grandfather could make all stringed instruments. That is why there was an amazing string chapel in our family -- they could sing and play; we had double bass, violoncello, mandolin, balalaika, guitar, and violin. Everything was made with hands of my grandfather. And before me, others could do this as well.

02:37 Interviewer: Please tell, when the war started in 1939, did you somehow understand that the war started? How did you perceive it?

02:46 Interviewee: We perceived it this way -- we were listening to radio and once we were listening to the program which Germans broadcasted to Warsaw and heard terrible words that were not understandable. They spoke in Polish, of course, because it was Poland in here at that time, and they warned people this way - "Whoever would go against us, his heart would stop and his brain would dry up" - ((foreign language)). And I am sitting and trembling. The neighbor is having me on her lap and her husband was captain reserve. She is holding me on her lap and asking, "Baby, why are you shaking?" I said, "I don't understand how can the heart stop and in particular I don't understand how a brain can dry up? I am very scared, I am very scared." And then with common effort the elders started explaining why they [Germans] were scaring us. This was in general a hardly interpreted feeling, it had a fearful influence on me as a child. Soon after that the dad was taken to army, mobilized. The neighbor captain reserve was mobilized and many other residents of Druskininkai. But my father got to Grodno and, as you know, the war ended fast and he returned soon, but the captain died in Katyn while others, my uncle, were captured by Bolsheviks. (He) got to Kozelsk, not far from Katyn, he had not been home for a long time but then returned. But already when the war started, the wave of Jews started moving from Poland to the East and many people of Jewish nationality settled here in Druskininkai, those who thought they could escape Germans and find a savior here. Yes, this was a survival. Some worked as teachers in a school -- I was in the fourth grade back then. Others went further to Russia and with the time they spread and not many of them remained here permanently. But this was the first signal that they were escaping Germans and looking for a shelter and saving their lives.

05:55 Interviewer: Tell me please, before the World War II in Lithuania, I mean before 1941 --

06:04 Interviewee: -- Yes?

06:08 Interviewer: Were there many Jews in Druskininkai?

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06:10 Interviewee: Over eight hundred people. But the first, when Bolsheviks came to us in 1939, the most rich Jews such as Vorobeichiks, Pinchuks, Frenkels – there was a big Frenkel and a small Frenkel, they held vast possessions; Chekhovski who owned an electro station – built it and put into operation. They all were deported as rich men and exiled to Russia. With time, after the end of the World War II, they got to Poland, from Poland to Israel and after fifty-four years my classmates, few people, came here and we met after fifty four years. They came to me to this little house, started hugging and kissing me. I said, 'Stop. Stay next to each other I need to recognize you.' And I remembered them all. Named their first and last names. They were very surprised. Then I said, "Well, now we can kiss". We were sitting here, lighted the fireplace and spent the whole night remembering and crying until morning. Well, one [of them] died, others visit from time to time. This year and last year I met Mick Chikhovcky, the grandson of the owner of the electro station.

08:08 Interviewer: Please tell, do you remember 22 June 1941?

08:12 Interviewee: I remember. We didn't suspect anything, we didn't think that something this bad could have happened. And suddenly we heard that many airplanes were flying over, but nobody bombed the town. And we, I remember, tumbled out of bed in a night dress. I saw that all adults were outside already and we didn't know what had happened and for a long time nobody informed what was really happening but we suspected that something was wrong. There was a pioneer camp near us and right away it started getting ready to leave; and all children left. And I also had this idea that when [we] felt that the war started, and later it was declared, I wanted without telling neither my mother nor my father, nobody, to leave with these kids under flags with drums beating but I was scared that they would be looking for me and it would be a sadness that I went missing somewhere. So we stayed. Stayed to our own misfortune. Later, my mother's brother came on a horse to my father, he was around the same age as my father, uncle Kiril. And he said, 'Misha, let's go'. But my father said, "No, I would not leave. I would stay with the family because I don't know how the situation would develop". But the situation developed very terribly because even though there was no one in our town, but all the Germany army was outside of Minsk. It is like we were left in a bag. At that time, the majority of the population living here were Polish, Lithuanians only lived in peripheral villages, in the vicinity. And here in the city there were not so many Lithuanians, one or two studied in school with us but very few. But back then -- the border was 150 meters from here and it was along this river till Utefi where it merged into a dry border. We were on Polish side and there was Lithuania. At that time the youth which was -- although there was no border here under the Soviet rule, it was the Soviet Lithuanian Socialist Republic -- but then suddenly this border restored. And from there, before the Bolsheviks came, Polish army was escaping Germans and crossing the border. Lithuanians were accepting everyone. Those who wanted to leave could do so without any visas or passes, they were taking a boat and Lithuanians were receiving the Poles. And not far from here, two or three kilometers, stayed a guardian here, corps guarding the border zone in 1939. And all the soldiers who wanted to escape, were leaving to Lithuania.

12:31 Interviewer: I understand, but let's get back to 1941. What was happening there with the Poles and what was happening with Lithuanians?

12:40 Interviewee: Well, Lithuanians -- the Poles left in 1946-1948 --

12:46 Interviewer: -- no, no. In 1941, in June

12:50 Interviewee: Ah, in June. Well --

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12:53 Interviewer: -- there were no Germans here, if I understand it right.

12:56 Interviewee: What?

12:57 Interviewer: There were no Germans in here --

12:58 Interviewee: There were not.

12:59 Interviewer: They went further. What was here?

13:02 Interviewee: There was a deadly silence here that everyone was afraid to even stick their noses outside. We were given a strict order not to go outside. We only saw how the store across us was being robbed.

13:22 Interviewer: By whom?

13:24 Interviewee: By local people. And my brother and I took to the field with our cousins, we sat and watched what was happening there. We saw how Germans passed and then they returned and rode away. At that time young men came here all along from Neman, wore white arm bands and also for some time they lived in sanitariums. Because vacationists also stayed in sanitarium and there was much food, young men joined them, they lived there, went to eat there and stayed overnight. They initiated a hunt on people who, according to them, were troubled (wrong). Komsomol members, Communists, although there was no single communist among local people. Then someone else...

14:39 Interviewer: Who were those young men white arm bands?

14:42 Interviewee: They were predominantly... um... They worked behind Neman and those villages.

14:50 Interviewer: I understand, but who were they? Poles?

14:53 Interviewee: No, only Lithuanians. They were a group of twenty people, they tied white arm bands and had few bicycles, few guns, and started to report to Alytus as all administration was in Alytus. They were in communication and received commands from there. Stars were attached to Jews' front and back and they could not walk on streets, only along roads. They became used for different kinds of labor, fatigue duties. Well --

15:46 Interviewer: I want to clarify, the whole of process of attaching stars and everything was controlled only by those men with white arm bands?

15:58 Interviewee: Yes, yes. Germans were not involved yet.

Interviewer: Were there Germans?

Interviewee: There were no Germans in here. It was established by the group of white men who started controlling everything in here.

Interviewer: What else were they doing?

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Interviewee: It was already a jail. Ghetto was organized right away and Jews were driven to Ghettoes. Jews mainly concentrated and lived near the former synagogue -- it is where the green institution for mud cures is now, closer to the amusement square. There was a synagogue and there was the street where their asana lived, and rabbi. First, the ghetto was organized there. It lasted for less than a year and then it was removed to where (the stela) is, near the church. They were resettled and lived there until they were taken to execution. So, once we saw Jews coming with shovels from the forest, from the side of Ratnicha where the Byelorussian bazaar is now -- do you know where it is? Behind the street intersection where the gas station is, when you enter the Druskininkai -- Jews were coming with shovels. My mother knew them and asked -- I also heard it -- from where were they coming. They said they were coming from the Sventoyansk swamp. 'What were you doing there?' - 'We dug a big hole'. 'What for?' - 'We don't know'. The next day people came to our house and asked my father to go to the police.

18:36 Interviewer: Who came?

18:38 Interviewee: A man with a white arm band. They never introduced themselves. We did not know their last names, or who they were. My father was taking care of bees, we had a big bee garden. He finished, washed his hands, dressed up and left with the man. He then returned again and told to the mother, 'Mama, take my knife'. So he left his little pocket knife and went to the jail -- the jail was on Churlen 53, now it is 53. It was the house of Gushchi and they already had their office in that house. After some time my mother went to that house and saw that the father and other people laid behind the fence on the grass in a good mood and nothing dangerous the mother saw for them to be there. We waited but he was not released. For the night my mother took a pillow and a blanket

20:06 Interviewer: Did you also go there with your mother with a pillow and a blanket?

20:10 Interviewee: Yes, we went to watch. We passed him the blanket and the pillow. There were even more people by the time we came. Some of them I saw before, and some I did not know. What was happening there I do not know but by 5am -- there was a terrible thunder during the night. And at 5 in the morning we heard that two trucks passed. And the road back then a typical rural sandy road. After some time the trucks returned and then we could go outside because it was prohibited to hang about after certain time of day, I forgot after what time. We followed the track of the truck and found a place in the forest where the hole was already covered with sand and the truck rode over the ground surface two times. But still the ground was chapped. My mother fell down there and started crying. "It is them", she said -- ah, we ran to the place but nobody was there, they were taken away already. We thought then that our father was shot in there.

Interviewer: Did you run to the jail after you saw the hole?

Interviewee: After we saw the hole we ran there. Nobody was there. But how many of them were there and who else was dropped into the hole -- we did not know. After we saw that that one was missing, and that one, and that one, and that one, and that one was taken, but we did not want to believe that they could be killed so fast. They were taken in the evening and at 5 in the morning they were already shot. That's how it was.

Interviewer: Were there any witnesses who heard or saw anything?

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22:43 Interviewee: There a little house nearby where the family of Zabelsky lived. They heard screaming and shooting but we heard nothing. We did not leave the house and heard nothing. People started going there every day. Our relatives and those who disappeared. Constant going to the place started. Mother did not wait for too long and ordered a coffin. We hid it because grandmother was very mad 'You want to bury him. They should have been taken somewhere'. But they had not come. My father was respected by one rich family, the woman whose husband died. My father was a builder, he could estimate the costs, build everything. He was influential in the city. And when the husband of Pani Kurucova died, with every question she would come to my father. He was helping her and did everything what she needed, both delicate and the most simple work because she had -- at the Dineikos street where the Vilnius spa is -- there her own houses, cottages (dachas) as well as her own (Ful Vargas) at Kloniškės. He houses were loved by commissar of the city, Kurt Martel. He was married to Hitler's cousin, was very beautiful and she was not.

25:18 Interviewer: Did you see them?

25:20 Interviewee: Yes, of course. They had a son Peter who was sticking out his tongue at us and showing the fig sign all the same. We also were doing this in return but so that nobody would see us. He was a horrible boy. Maybe two years younger than me. He [Kurt Martel] had his residence there and at the time while Jews were executed in Holland and Belgium, he accumulated much wealth and had his own art gallery there. But Pani Kuralcova could speak both German and French and her mother asked to dig up the hole to bury the husband in a human way. For two months he was very resistant but as people were constantly going to that grave, she managed to persuade him and he gave a permission. So that everybody who wanted, could take the bodies of their relatives. He set date where people could go. My mother went there earlier while some woman and a man helped me to put the coffin on a horse in a wagon and together with aunt Yulia we rode to the hole. The cousin of my father, who made the coffin, also went to that hole to help. Before that my mother saw a dream where the father told her, "Look for me in a place where you go. I would lie on the right side of the hole at the very bottom. Look for me there". The digging started. Not everyone was let inside but only those who disappeared that night. [People] gathered and started looking for theirs. It was something dreadful. It was a very hot summer and during that period the bodies decayed and the smell was just awful. I cannot even tell. Mother fainted and was taken to bushes. Aunt Yulia and uncle Pavlusha, the cousin, were turning the bodies and helping identifying people to distribute them. After everyone was taken, my father was on the right side at the very bottom. When he was -- he had no fingers, his teeth tipped from his mouth including dental crowns.

29:15 Interviewer: I cannot understand, he did not have them? Or they just --

29:20 Interviewee: -- knocked-out. They had putrefied. I wanted to clean his hair and they just fell together with the skin/ He lay on his side. His trousers were rolled. I wanted to clean his legs but the skin flaked off. For four years I could not eat meat at all. I could not look at it. My mother was still unconscious. Close relatives who lived in the same house were afraid to come so that it did not look like an accessory or a complicity. I do not understand why close relatives who lived with us in the same house did not go there. Aunt Yulia was a third person and the uncle lived in that area. And we lived at 'Paganka' at the street crossing in our previous house. It was returned to us after the shift of power. [It] was nationalized as grandfather died and did not reassign it. There were three houses. Well, we put the father in a blanket sheet because we cleaned him a little. He was dressed well. There was still an engagement ring on his hand, nobody took it. We swathed him, put in a coffer and took to the graveyard. Half of Druskieniki gathered there. They waited for us. We came with a dray-cart, took off

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the coffer and noticed the mother was not with us. She was left in the forest. Everyone had to wait again. There was no single sound, nobody said anything. I only looked at the coffin – it was opened, the nail was sticking out of it. I found a rock and nailed it. I did not know what to do. Nobody called the priest in such a tragic minute. The priest himself waited for Germans to come sooner. Later we saw that mother was coming staggering and half-dead. We lowered the body into the hole and buried him. Nobody was crying. Nobody made any sound. It was [happening] in such a silence... The father was 43 years old. And others were buried the same way after being found. There were few unrecognized bodies; they were and are still there [in the hole]. We also had a very beautiful dog and this (arntz) commissar took away out dog. He kept it to himself. And every time we came to the graveyard, we saw the dog lying on the grave although it was not at father's funerals. It just smelled the father at the graveyard. Surprisingly there were many Jews among those [killed] people. Vizimberg, the father together with his daughter, the member of Komsomol; Pintel, the member of Komsomol, very good young man who studied very well, the eighth-grader; the friend of my father with whom they worked together, gifted hands, BilletYankel; the Pole Sikolski, absolutely do not understand why him; young woman of 22 years old, Verbickaja.

34:49 Interviewer: How do you know who was there?

34:54 Interviewee: Because Druskieniki, we all -- Medvedev Nikolai, we all were going to the same church to pray. Moinich Nikolai -- Butoko, for example, is the same family as mine; they came to build a resort. I found a book and read it, I did not even know.. There was a writer ((Surautis)) he had an Award of the Fourth Degree, he died two month ago. He wrote a book ((perkaro okupacia)) and he described that he met in the forest one of those shot. He came and asked, "Mister Suravets, I know you as a good and honest person. Tell me, what is going to happen to us?" 'You should know that all royal families will get hurt. Including Sokolovs and you, and others'. He told him so, now I know about it. Only after I read the book, I found out. But the one whom he told, he did not pass it to anyone. He had no time. He was caught and so they died together. I have a picture, in honor of the 40th anniversary of the victory they were put up a monument but it is wooden and it starts to rot already.

36:58 Interviewer: Let's get back again to those days. The shooting of that group, on what day did it happen?

37:10 Interviewee: They -- the father was called on July 15, 1941. And next morning at 5, on July 16, they were shot.

37:24 Interviewer: When this happened, was ghetto still existing?

37:30 Interviewee: Already existed. On that very first place where Jews were mostly concentrated, around the synagogue.

37:46 Interviewer: Did you seen that ghetto?

37:49 Interviewee: That ghetto I did not see. I saw the other ghetto but people were not allowed inside because if they were out and saw someone familiar, they would ask for favors. So we would agree and leave a can of honey or anything downstairs. But it was important to go together so that one would watch while the other would pass.

38:37 Interviewer: Did you go there?

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38:38 Interviewee: I did, but not inside.

38:43 Interviewer: Um-hum, I understand. But did you go to pass food?

38:46 Interviewee: Because my mother was afraid to go alone, someone had to watch. And in most cases we were passing the food from the side of ((foreign language)) and near the Lipschis Museum.

38:55 Interviewer: Were you passing it to certain people or in general?

39:09 Interviewee: Yes. It was known there that we would come, they waited and took it.

39:18 Interviewer: To whom were you passing it?

39:20 Interviewee: To Lishkovsky, Bliaha. Lishkovsky was a good person... The town was not big, we all knew each other. Moreover, we all were kids and many Jews studied in our class.

39:44 Interviewer: Um... Was the ghetto guarded?

39:49 Interviewee: There was a very big fence. A tall one. It was impossible to climb it or jump over. And the hole could not be made. There was only one entrance. Entrance-exit. But we never went inside through the entrance because it was inspected. Well here it was inspected as well, probably, but we go when nobody was around.

40:23 Interviewer: Could Jews leave the Ghetto?

40:25 Interviewee: Only for job. But, I should tell you, it was very hard for them. They were very tortured periodically. There was a headman of the Jewish community which lived there. But I do not remember who, they changed few times. And occasionally there were required to pay a bribe.

Interviewer: A bribe?

Interviewee: A bribe. They had to collect certain amount of perfume, or soap, or something else. Sometimes silver or jewelry. They were tortured this way for the whole period they lived there, from 1942 till 1943, until they took the very shirt off their back. And if not – they would be shot. It was very hard for them, but they even managed to get some things when they were leaving to work. [People] secretly threw things to them as well, but I did not see that. I only saw them always bolt upright and scared to step on a sidewalk, only along the road where cars were coming. Well there were not many cars, only horses and dray-carts.