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GDULA, Gizela
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust
English
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In this interview, Gizela Gdula, born in Bełżec in 1924, who helped at her mother's bakery during the German occupation, discusses bakers' work for the death camp located in Bełżec. Gdula concentrates on the cooperation between the camp and the bakery, and adds that her mother was paid by the Germans. She also talks about a Jewish man named Moshe **Helman** [**Hellman**] whom Gdula's mother was hiding at the bakery, and his denunciation by someone from the village and subsequent arrest. Gdula also speaks about her aunt, who was hiding **Helman's** sister, **Salka**, and her little daughter, through the entire occupation. She describes behavior of Ukrainian employees of the camp towards Poles and concentrates on one incident when Germans accused Żyłka's villagers of a crime perpetrated by Ukrainians, and as a result killed about 10 people from this village. Gdula mentions the first days of the war and the Polish soldiers who perished during the fights in Bełżec. She also recalls train transports of Jews to the camp in Bełżec, and adds some information about the activities in the camp.

Tape 1

[01:] 00:12:07 – [01:] 05:02:02
00:04 – 05:06

The interviewee introduces herself as Gizela Gdula, born in 1924, in Bełżec; says her father's entire family came from Bełżec, while her mother was from Lvov; describes the beginning of the war when the Polish-German front ran through the village along the street where now the fire station is located; recalls Polish soldiers who perished during the fights; remembers when the German army officially arrived in the village equipped with tanks and cars; describes how her mother, who was German by birth, asked the Germans for permission to bury the bodies of the perished Polish soldiers and how, after receiving their permission, the village built a little chapel where they buried the bodies; says that after the war their remains were moved to the cemetery; asked about the death camp in Bełżec, she cannot say when construction began, but she adds that it was mostly Germans, Ukrainians, and Jews who worked at the construction of the camp; says she doesn't recall many Poles being employed there, with the exception of a Polish blacksmith; asked about a work camp supposedly existing in Bełżec before the construction of the death camp, she answers with certainty that there wasn't such a camp in the village; adds that the death camp was located behind the train station, and that she remembers shouts coming from that direction; says that both the station and the camp were fenced off from the village by layers of barbed wire, and that there was a fence and a gate guarded by the German soldier where the camp faced the main road; says that her mother's bakery was located in the same house in which the interview is taking place; recalls that that Germans supplied flour and 3 Jewish workers from the camp; adds that they were the same 3 Jews whom Germans took away later during the

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liquidation of the camp; describes how baked bread was delivered to the camp by Polish wagon drivers via the main road; describes how the German soldier would take the horse wagon through the gate and come back after emptying it inside to give the wagon drivers back their horse wagon.

[01:] 05:02:03 – [01:] 09:13:02
05:07 – 09:28

She says that the work in the bakery was divided into shifts, and that they baked a lot of bread, perhaps hundreds of loaves; says she doesn't know if the bread was for the SS; says she only knows that it went to the camp; recalls that Jews working at the bakery were guarded by German soldiers; continues by saying that she also helped with baking, and that there were Polish bakers as well, but they had passed away already; she mentions that the work continued day and night, without any break; asked if Germans were burning bodies in the camp, she answers that she doesn't know but suspects that they were for there was a stench in the village that was so horrible it was impossible to open windows; says that it lasted several months; when asked how many people were burnt, she answers that she doesn't know for she was a child at that time and was not interested in such things; asked again how close she managed to get to the camp, she says that she was only on the main road in front of the gate during the delivery of bread to the camp; says that the German soldier took the horse wagon filled with baskets of bread, and that she had never been inside the camp; *[Gdula assures the interviewer that she is not lying.]*

Commented [AZ1]: It's unclear if this means there were Polish bakers before the war who had died by the time she was making bread during the war or if she means that there were Polish bakers at the time but they had died by the time of the interview. I think this could easily be cleared up by a native Polish speaker who could check the tense of the original.

[There is an interruption in the interview, during which the camera crew is talking, and Gadula sits looking a little disoriented.]

When asked if she knew the names of Germans and Ukrainians coming to get the bread, she says she can only remember one German named **Irman [Herman]**; recalls that he was later on killed by partisans on the road to Tomaszów; adds that one of the rooms in the house was occupied by Wehrmacht soldiers, who were not connected with the camp; mentions that there were a number of them in the village and that they were living mainly in the train station buildings; says that Jews performed various tasks for them; specifically remembers a laundry where Jewish women washed clothing for the German soldiers.

[01:] 09:13:03 – [01:]14:07:15
09:29 – 14:35

Asked if she saw the commander of the camp, she says that she did, and could probably still recognize him due to his specific, very light complexion; remembers how he rode his horse through the village and how he would make way for an animal, but purposely rode right into people; recalls the Ukrainians, who, while drunk, burnt a barn where German horses were kept; says the Germans accused the Poles of this crime and killed ten people from Żyłka village as reprisal; says that they selected them randomly and shot them in a nearby meadow; asked about a number of Jews living in Bełżec before the war, she cannot give a specific answer, but remembers the names of the Jewish families from the village; she names **Wikier [Vikier]** and **Racimor [Ratzimor]** who owned a tavern before the war; adds that behind the tavern, over the

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river, there was also a synagogue; adds that during the war people built houses at this location; asked about the Jewish man named Moshe **Helman [Hellman]**, she says that she knew him quite well and that his family lived behind the railroad; says that he was quite assimilated and even had Aryan documents; adds that during the war he was working at the bakery, but someone denounced him to the Germans as being a Jew; says that the Germans took him to the camp shortly before its liquidation; remembers him as a very nice, middle age man.

[There is an interruption in the interview.]

She discusses the Ukrainians who also would come to get bread at the bakery; in response to a question by the interviewer, she says that her mother did not do any business with them and did not invite them for vodka; says she is not sure if she could identify them now, but does remember some names like **Trautwaj [Traltwaj]**, **Lonki [Jonki]**, **Woloszyn [Woloszyn]**; says that of the Germans, she only remembers **Irman**, and the commandant of the camp, whom the villagers called **Dolf [Adolf]**, which was supposed to be his real name; *[Translator notes that this information does not match historical sources which name three commanders of the camp, none of them by this name: <http://ortografia4.appspot.com/wiki/Belzec>];* asked if she saw Jews building embankments on the German-Russian border, she says that she heard about it but did not see it herself because she never went to this location.

[01:] 14:07:16 – [01:] 19:23:01
14:36 – 20:03

When asked if the Poles built embankments, she says that they did not; when asked if there were Jewish transports passing through Belzec on foot, she says that she did not witness it, and adds that everything to do with the camp took place near the railroad and that she did not go there; mentions that many people who might have remembered more had already passed away; recalls a man named **Misiewicz** who could probably supply more information; *[it is unclear whether this man is still alive]*; when asked about the head of the Jewish township in pre-war Belzec, she says she doesn't recall the existence of such township; also says she does not recall the building which would house its headquarters; underscores that there was only a synagogue and an adjacent bath house; asked if Jews were escaping from the village after the war broke up, she states that they remained in the village.

[There is an interruption in the interview while a new interviewer takes over.]

Asked again if the same three Jews worked in the bakery during the entire existence of the camp, she confirms it; mentions that they were middle age men with the exception of one, younger man named **Jankiel [Yankiel]**; also adds that she tried to talk to them but they were too frightened to talk about the camp; continues by saying that they slept in the bakery when bread was in the oven; recalls that they were lying down wherever they could—in the wood storage or in the corner of the room—because this 2-3 hour rest was the only rest they were allowed; adds that their German guards were not the same and that they changed each day; goes on to tell the story of the bakery, which was built by her father right before the war, in 1939; asked about the number of ovens, she responds that there was only one, but getting deeper in the history of the

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house, she says that her parents bought it right after WWI, in 1914 and that it used to be an egg warehouse; says it had a basement underneath the entire building; states that in this basement her father built a second, bigger oven; when the interviewer suggests that the production of bread increased largely during the war (before the war people in the villages used to bake their own bread), she admits that few people bought bread before the war, and that during the war, the bakery was producing 24 hours without a break; adds that after the bread was ready, they loaded it on the horse wagon and 2 wagon drivers named **Krupa** and **Szepelek [Szepelek]** took it to the camp; she says that **Szepelek** was her family's neighbor and that he was Ukrainian; says that he had to go back to Ukraine after the liberation because of the fights between Poles and Ukrainians (most likely she is referring to the fight between Polish partisans and Ukrainian UPA fighters); notes that many Ukrainians left at that time; asked about Jewish transports, she answers that she used to see them when she was at the train station traveling to some place; recalls people crowded in freight cars, small windows covered with barbed wires, and people begging for water.

[01:] 19:23:02 – [01:] 23:17:12
20:04 – 24:07

She recalls that it was impossible to get closer to the cars from the Jewish transport because they were guarded by Germans; adds that one could hear shouts and screams when the train was entering the camp; remembers seeing fire on the territory of the camp and smoke coming on occasion from its direction; comments again on the terrible smell penetrating the village; asked if she knows of anybody who escaped the camp, she answers that she does not, but she doubts that someone could, because the camp was strictly guarded.

[The previous interviewer asks a question.]

Asked if she knows about a Jewish child who survived the war hidden in Belzec by Polish people, she answers that it was her aunt, her father's sister, who was hiding **Moshe Helman's** sister, **Salka**, and her little daughter.

[The second interviewer resumes.]

She continues to say that her aunt lived in the part of the village where there is now a store; says that she lived in great fear and that she went through a lot hiding **Salka**; describes how her aunt hid **Salka** at the cemetery and was bringing her food there; describes how she hid her in her own house, under the sofa, and consequently the little girl could not walk after the liberation; reports that after the liberation **Salka** went to Israel, and even wrote to her aunt; mentions that the local paper recently mentioned the need to commemorate her aunt by building her a monument; asked once more, she repeats that there were three Jews working in the bakery and that Germans took them back to the camp during its liquidation; adds that people suspected something horrible being prepared in the camp; says she was only 15 years old, but she heard her parents talking about it; asked about payment for bread, she said that the Germans paid every month and that her mother was collecting money at the German headquarters; asked how much money they were being paid, she answers that it was enough (meaning quite a nice sum).

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