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KURKOWSKA, Marianna  
Polish Witness to the Holocaust  
Polski  
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## Summary

The interview is made with Ms. Marianna Kurkowska, born Władysława in 01.05.1923 in Opole, who as a child had a Jewish friend. She witnessed her murder and talks about the existent ghetto in Opole.

## Tape 1

[01]:00:50:15 – [01]:03:49:21  
00:45 – 03:52

Ms. Kurkowska was born 01.05.1923 in Opole [**German Oppeln**]. Together with her husband and two sons she moved in 1954 to Poniadowa [**Poniatowa**], where her daughter was born.

She tells that she attended primary school only irregularly, because of the outbreak of the Second World War. She remembers that at the opening of the school year, the teacher came out of the school and told them: “Children, go home, because war broke out.” She continues that till the 4<sup>th</sup> grade she went to school irregularly, because the schools were transformed to storehouses by the Germans.

(01:02:14:12 / 02:13 – she talks to a person next to her)  
(01:02:28:16/ 02:27 – someone enters the room)

She tells that the town was taken by the Germans; there was no Russian occupation before in Opole.

(01:02:57:06/ 02:57 – someone enters the room)

At the other hand her husband who comes from **Wolyn** [**german Wolhynien/ ukr. Волинь**], experienced a Russian occupation.

[01]:03:49:21 – [01]:05:55:24  
03:52 – 06:03

Ms. Kurkowska remembers her Jewish („girl”-)friend, who lived at the same street – **Ogrodowa Street [Polish ul. Ogrodowa]**. She remembers that she was called **Rutka [from Ruth?]**. She tells that she was the only child of the Zgrzyszektery family [**Zgrzyszekterzy ?**]. Ms. Kurkowska as a child went to her place to play, because Rutka came from a wealthy family and had dolls and other toys. When the mother of Ms. Kurkowska however got to know that the building of a ghetto was planned, she forbade her daughter to go, because she was scared that she might be recognized as a Jew. Ms. Kurkowska remembers that Rutka was given to someone of the Polish part of the family to keep her during those times.

[01]:05:55:24 – [01]: :10:48:13  
06:03 – 11:08

Ms. Kurkowska describes the ghetto in Opole. The ghetto was surrounded by a wooden fence. Between the planks were slits through which people were able to look inside the ghetto. Above the fence were wires. The Ogrodowa Street was split and one half belonged to the ghetto.

After the death of her mother, her father moved with her (8 years old) and her younger brother (3 years old) to a small village in the countryside **Janieńskowice** [?]. At that time she heard that Rutka was in the ghetto.

She continues that it was a coincidence when she saw Rutka together with a German, when she returned to the town on one occasion. The German **Jork [Jörg?]** was a handsome, tall person. She characterizes him as “very good”, because he warned the Polish partisans. She explains that the German told the people that he has to kill the girl otherwise he would be killed. She tells that he carried the girl on his hands and that Rutka put her hands around his neck asking in Polish, if he would kill her. The German knowing Polish very well answered: “No, child, no.” Together they went on the pavement till he stopped and told her: „Do you know Rutka, now you will go there, because there your mother is.” He let her off his hands and she began to run. Then he shot her in the back.

Ms. Kurkowska even remembers how the girl was dressed: a blue pullover with a red stripe to button up on the back, the cuffs also with a red stripe, and tights till the shoes.

She remembers that directly after the killing a carriage came and peasants undressed her and took her for burying. She tells that if children with holes in their dresses on the back were seen, then it was clear that the clothing was dragged from the dead.

[01]:10:48:13 – [01]:12:24:21  
11:08 – 12:48

Ms. Kurkowska tells that she heard from others that probably another girl from the Zgrzysektery family was able to flee from the ghetto in Warsaw and sat into the train to Opole. Next to her sat a Pole and they began to talk, because he thought that he was sitting next to a Polish girl. Only in Opole he got to know that she was a Jew and he brought her to the police and supposedly was also killed. She doesn't remember who told her this, but she is sure, that it had to be directly after the liberation.

[01]:12:24:21 – [01]:15:55:23  
12:48 – 16:28

Ms. Kurkowska tells that she looked into the ghetto through the fence. She remembers that the ghetto was overcrowded with people. She remembers that mostly Jews from **Vienna [German Wien]** traded with bedclothes and clothing.

She remembers that if the German guards backed off, especially during the nights, food was thrown into the ghetto, for example: bread, potatoes, turnips. Her parents didn't do it, but two of the younger brothers of her mother took part in these actions.

Ms. Kurkowska admits that she didn't like all Jews from Opole. She tells that they weren't so tidy and their long robes were dirty in contrast to the clothing of Rutka and the Jews from Vienna.

She remembers a Jew **Ariel** who bought fish from her father. She tells that if her brother was naughty they told him that Ariel would take him.

[01]:15:55:23 – [01]:21:08:05  
16:28 – 21:54

Ms. Kurkowska assumes that the Jews were brought by trains and afterwards goaded to the ghetto but she didn't see it. She saw however that the Jews were goaded from the ghetto to **Poniatowej**. Who wasn't able to walk was shot and the ill were carried on carriages. She saw the dead and the bags left behind on the way when they became too heavy. She tells that she walked through the ghetto after it was abandoned and walked through the flats. She remembers that in some were still standing bowls with soup. She didn't take anything, but there were a lot of people who plundered. Once she was almost discovered by a German when she was in the ghetto, but she was able to hide behind a stove. Later she was afraid to go alone, but together with her („gril”-)friends she still went (into the former ghetto) and found a ball of wool and a doll. When she returned home she found everything under her bed, so that her mother didn't see. She tells that she didn't see shootings of Jews during the exile from the ghetto.

[01]:21:08:05 – [01]:22:56:01  
21:54 – 23:46

Ms. Kurkowska tells that the German found Rutka after the ghetto was not existent anymore. There wasn't any fence around anymore, and because of that she concludes that it had to be already in 1945. She continues that the Jews were taken from Opole to Poniatowej. Probably some of them were taken away by wagons, but she doesn't know for sure. In what way they were taken to **Majdanek** in **Lublin** she doesn't know as well.

[01]:22:56:01 – [01]:26:43:00  
23:46 – 27:42

Ms. Kurkowska remembers the time when the Germans came to Opole and before the ghetto was build. In 1939 the Polish army stayed in Opole. They were riding on horses. She remembers that some soldiers were eating at the place of her aunt a noodle soup [Polish rosół] when a boy ran into the room shouting: “Run away, because the Germans are already in Opole.” The soldiers run away to the forest. She continues that half an hour afterwards she went out on the street and saw a German on a motorcycle. She assumes that it could have been a scout. The Germans established their headquarters. From this time on the Jews had to wear white bandages with a blue star on it. She tells that in Opole were a lot of Jewish shops, polish ones were only one or two. Her father worked in the sugar factory.

[01]:26:43:00 – [01]:30:29:06  
27:42 – 31:38

Ms. Kurkowska remembers the competition within the Jews who sold beef in small stalls (meaning small shops) near the park. She remembers that the Jews sold at the marketplace apples, pears, plums as well as fish and crayfish. She tells that after the German came to Opole those shops didn't exist anymore and the Jews – before the ghetto was build – had to move out / were displaced. Ms. Kurkowska tells that besides Rutka she knew another Jew

who went by the name **Benek**. He was 16 – 18 years old, was a handsome blond young man with curly hair. Ms. Kurkowska assumes that he was later on in the ghetto as well.

[01]:30:29:06 – [01]:35:35:06  
31:38 – 36:57

Ms. Kurkowska talks about the German **Jał/ Jonk [Jörg?]** who helped the Poles. Among other thing he warned the Polish guerillas/ partisans, when he got to know about some actions against them.

She continues that there were no Ukrainians in Opole. She describes the Russian army as “wilderness” [Polish *dziczyna*]. Afterwards she tries to determine the size of the ghetto. She adds that the food was thrown into the ghetto to someone concrete at the other side and that the whole action took place after a certain signal, for example knocking on the fence or motto/ password. She remembers that there was a Jewish police.