

WOIŃSKA, Janina
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
English
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In this interview, Janinia Woińska, born in Milejczyce, in 1919, a pharmacist working on the territory of Brańsk's ghetto, tells the story of hiding Jews in her pharmacy before and during deportation from Brańsk ghetto. She also mentions others, who were hiding local Jews or helping to organize hiding places for them. Woińska also describes the incidents of denouncing Jewish hiding places by the Judenrat official as well as by the local Polish population. She also gives details concerning murders of Jews committed by local people already after the war. In addition, she describes Soviet occupation and concentrates on favoring Jews and persecution of Poles during that time.

File 1 of 3

[There is a sound of passing cars during the entire interview.]

00:42-36:35

[01:] 00:47:15 – [01:] 03:00:01

00:42 – 03: 00

Q: Ma'am, first I would like to ask you what is your name, where were you born and when.

A: Woińska Janina. I was born in Milejczyce. Recently it was Siemiatycki district. In 1919.

Q: And where were you living before the war?

A: Before—meaning I was in Milejczyce from birth, I finished elementary school, till fifth grade in Milejczyce, and then I went to the middle school in **Dowiczyn [Dowczyn]**. There I was—meaning, according to the old system—so I fini... I went through second, third, fourth, and fifth grade, and after finishing fifth grade, I went to Vilnius, to high school. I went there to high school named after Orzeszkowa, and I finished it, according to the old system, I finished, I passed my final exams ("Matura," a serious of comprehensive exams both oral and written, which traditionally establishes one's maturity) in [19]37 and immediately applied to the University and luckily, I got in. Because at that time it was also difficult to get in. When I was passing University exams, only every fifth person was getting in. Thank God, I passed.

Q: What department?

A: And I was accepted. And I was studying in Vilnius for two years before the war. Unfortunately war interrupted my studies, I was still passing my last exam—from the junior year—on the second of July, [19]39, and on the fourth I came to Milejczyce, and my sister called me to come to her, but I said: “Have mercy, let me stay at home for a while.” She said to come, and on the sixth...on the sixth I did come to Brańsk and I still live here.

Q: So, from [19]39.

A: From [19]39, but first, you know, war hasn't started yet, and then I lived through entire war here, only with the exception when I went away to stud...to finish my studies at Vilnius University. Pharmacy was moved to Łódź, so I went there and there I finished—

[01:] 03:00:01 – [01:]06:19:18
03: 00 – 06:28

A: So I only had those two years of break, how, meaning in my presence in Brańsk.

Q: And you were studying pharmacology, right?

A: Yes. Yes, yes.

Q: And during the war, when, did you work in your profession during the war?

A: Yes. Meaning, in general, I was helping my sister. At the beginning not much, but I did help. And my brother in law—my sister was a pharmacist—and she was a wife of, you know co-owner of a pharmacy, Pańczyk. And he was recruited right away, on the first of September he was recruited by the army. And he was in Wrze...he was assigned to Wrześć. But he came back only in [19]48. Yes, only in [19]48 he came back from England. Because first he was, meaning, well, as the front was moving, so he went through Romania, Yugoslavia, France and got to England.

Q: Ummm.

A: And he came back from England only in [19]48. And my sister and I were, well, our protectors immediately nationalized pharmacy—

Q: Who exactly?

A: Soviets. Because Soviets came right away. Wait, I am sorry, a week after the front line passed, Germans came here, and then there was an exchange. Germans withdrew, and Soviets came.

Q: Right, can you tell me how did the outbreak of the war look like, how do you remember these first—

A: You know, Brańsk itself, perhaps it will sound funny, but after all it was a small town, but it was bombarded during the very first days. And it was as if they have chosen exactly Jewish district. And the pharma...when everything was burning, we were a little afraid—the pharmacy was a bit to the side, vis a vis the church—so it was a little further from the place where it was burning. So first, we thought that the fire will reach us, but luckily it didn't. Part of the town was burnt down literally in a few days after the war broke up. A plane would fly, come down and, and shoot at the man plowing the field. There is no crowd, because, let's say, they were told, that here, because one could see, because there were a lot of people who came from all over, but when it comes to a field for example: there is a plowman, he is alone on the field with a horse and they could come down and shoot at him from a machine gun? So these were my impressions.

[01:]06:19:18 – [01:] 08:00:16
06:28 – 08:13

A: And then, when they were entering Brańsk, we escaped from the house and were sitting in the basement. Well, you know how it is, all kinds of prayers, we were doing everything, everything that was possible, so that's how we were behaving. So there was doctor Cywiński, the primary health service, because this basement was at their building. So we were sitting in this basement, and well, later, when they came, they were mainly separating all the men. And then, what can I—what impressions—when they already came, yes, this needs to be conveyed, that when they were entering, one felt such horror, such might, it was all so depressing. And they went further to Brześć, because they reached Brześć and then came back. Sold...army men, because meaning, after all, we didn't choose, they came to us and did what they pleased. They came, there were probably four doctors and they simply took rooms at our place and stayed there. But, I can't say, they behaved decently. And then when the front pulled back, these ones were leaving and the Soviets came. Well—

Q: How did it look like?

[01:] 08:00:16 – [01:] 11:02:06
08:13 – 11:22

A: If I am to tell you my impressions, they were awful. They came by this car—as much as there was this might, this strength, all this so, so very depressing, this here, at least this was the feeling, I thought to myself: “God, and this is to govern us?” Awf...Awful feeling. Well, maybe it's not proper to say that: dirt, stench and poverty.

Q: Meaning, how did it look like?

A: The car with the soldiers came, they all spread around, around this. Well, later, it's true, they organized the town, when already, when this, but the impressions were—

Q: And is it true that they had guns on strings? On leather straps.

A: That what?

Q: That they had guns on strings instead of leather straps?

A: No. I didn't see this. Ha, ha. I didn't see this, I can't say this.

Q: And what was going on with Brańsk's Jews in those first weeks of war? Did you see?

A: Meaning, you are saying when the ghetto was established?

Q: No, when the war broke up, when Germans came first—

A: Meaning—

Q: And then when Soviets came.

A: When Soviets came, Jews felt very sure of themselves and this saying „the streets are yours, the houses ours” was very true. And for example, this, what was his name, Pro...Proszański came. He was a pred...**predsiedatel** (RUSSIAN: a head of some organization), **predsiedatel**, yes, he came to us and of course, furniture—because of course luck had it that Pańczyk literally a week before the war ordered beautiful furniture, beautiful bedroom set made of birch and something else. In any case, very pretty and it cost four and a half thousand złoty, it was a lot of money, and they were paying for it in installments. But, he said that this, where is it, where is this bedroom set. And someone, I mean it was already a bit later, I don't remember any more, but in any case somebody said to hide it. And it was taken away to the country side, only few little things were left. And he came, because he had to have exactly this, this bedroom set, and not other. This, this was their mentality.

Q: And this Proszański, was he a Jew?

A: A Jew, Jew.

Q: From Brańsk?

A: Yes. Most likely from Brańsk. You know, it's hard for me to say, because I didn't know Brańsk very well and I didn't know those Jews, a little bit maybe, but I didn't have interactions with them. But in Brańsk, he was considered a Jew. **Predsiedatel**, yes? Was this his position?

Q: And when Soviets started coming here, what do you mean when you say that Jews felt sure of themselves?

[01:] 11:02:06 – [01:] 14:11:13

11:22 – 14:39

A: Well, they—

Q: Did you see something, something that was going on?

A: They had the power and they everything, like—for example, well, perhaps it wasn't in the first days, a bit later, but in any case, there was a talk about this, this intervention, the involvement into everything, so we hid, in two places, we hid part of the medications. And so, and this militia man comes to us and calls, meaning asks my sister to come to the militia station. And there NKWD man, (National Committee of Internal Affairs, Narodnaia Komisiia Vnutrennykh Dziel, NKWD), sister didn't go, I went because it was easier to twist things, or to lie a little, so I went. And he asks where else do we have medications? Because, as it turns out, there was this **Trust [Thrust]**, a Jew and a militia man—I don't know what was it, what was going on there—but in any case, they were searching for something at Dynda family and by chance they found not what they were looking for, but medications. So this one asks where else we have medications, because of this or that. I say that we don't have them anywhere—so they gave us back these medications, but of course with a certain—so this was their, their approach to us, they treatment of us.

Q: And this militia man who came for you, was it a Jew or not?

A: A Jew, Jew.

Q: And this NKWD man, who—

A: NKWD man was a Soviet, also most likely a Jew, and it was him who interrogated me, who led this interrogation. But a Jew and a Soviet.

Q: And this militia man that you are talking about, was he a Jew from Brańsk, a local?

A: Yes. **Trust**. I remember him.

Q: And were there—and where there Poles in this militia? During Soviet times?

A: I don't think so, you know, it's hard for me to say, but I don't think so. What do you think Mr. Zbyszek?

[male voice]

A: There was one Byelorussian, I think. Local. There were no Poles. At least I don't know of such incidents.

[main interviewee]

A: Well, I don't know, I can't say either, but it was rather, rather Jews.

Q: And so—

A: Well, you know when the power was in their hands, they were doing whatever they pleased.

Q: And what was going on with your pharmacy?

A: Well, we, meaning my sister, was in charge and I was helping as much as I could, as a student after two years of pharmacology. And later, in, in December—first there was Polish currency, so everything was sort of all right—and on the ninth, in any case at the beginning of December, there was a decree that Polish currency is no longer valid.

[01:] 14:11:13 – [01:] 17:04:18

14:39 – 17:40

A: Let's say, this decree that Polish currency is invalid came out on the ninth, and on the tenth they order us to pay 1000 zloty of some—

Q: Rubles.

A: Thousand rubles. Meaning, supposedly they, it was supposed to be an equal exchange, but we didn't have these rubles. We only had Polish currency, so how can we pay if we don't have it? And then they took away the pharmacy from us. They nationalized it. So, at the beginning it was, meaning both of us worked, but they immediately appointed a manager, also a Jew, a manager. It was **Chomski [Homski]**, who had a pharmaceutical supply store. So he surely did not have qualification to be a manager, but there was a Jewish woman, Kamieniecka, who, meaning they were married, and she attested that he had a diploma, that, that he had a right, but he surely didn't have a diploma, because there was no such, there was no such rules that the owner of the pharmaceutical supplies store had to have a diploma of Master of Pharmacology, so he didn't have qualifications to manage a pharmacy, but he was a manager—

Q: And this **Chomski** was also from Brańsk?

A: From Brańsk, from Brańsk, yes. But he, I have to say that he was behaving decently, meaning he wasn't especially malicious, only that he was a manager, you know, and I, I already worked—and my sister died very soon after, she died on February 10th. Meaning, it was a silly thing, appendix removal, but it just so happened that she got peritonitis and died on June 10th, so I stayed alone working just as an assistant.

Q: And who else was hired in the pharmacy?

A: And there was also his brother-in-law, and this purveyor, she was from Bielsko, what was her name, I don't remember her name already, in any case she, she behaved quite decently.

Q: Polish woman?

A: Jewish. Jewish. And this brother-in-law was also Jewish, I was the only one.

Q: And so—what was happening outside of your pharmacy in Brańsk during this time, what do you remember from this Soviet era?

A: Meaning, when it comes to the pharmacy, when these, when the Soviets came, they took two of our rooms, simply took them as army quarters. And there was this, some kind [*unclear*], I already don't remember, ha, ha. Some kind of institution was there. What would be interesting—

[01:] 17:04:18. - [01:] 20:05:06
17:40 – 20:48

Q: But for example, were other stores or craftsmanship also nationalized at that time? Do you remember if, for example, it happened to some of your friends? Who were your friends at that time in Brańsk?

A: You know, I didn't really have time for friendships, because there were too many things going on, but I was very close with, there were these two teachers, Ms. **Kapówna** [*the form of the name signifies that the woman wasn't married, Kapo*] and Ms. Kulczycka. Ms. Kulczycka was from this, Jasło and from Gorlice. So she came here, she came to Brańsk in, no, she came to Brańsk in [19]21. And she had worked as a teacher till probably [19]51. And later, as a church goer and as a **nieblagonadziezhna** (RUSSIAN: undesirable), they sent her to Mielnik. And Ms. **Kapówna**, they sent her to the village, right near Czeremcha, I don't remember the name, but in any case, half of the village was in our hands, and half was Soviet. So if you wanted to go there to visit her, you needed a special permission.

Q: And at this time at school, what was going on at your friends' school during Soviet times?

A: Wait a minute, the school was divided into Polish school, wait, I don't want to make something up, help me Mr. Zbyszek.

[*male voice*]

A: There was a school with Byelorussian as a teaching language—

[*main interviewee*]

A: Because a principal was **Finczenia** [**Filcheniak**], a Soviet, but he was married to a Polish woman. And she did not admit that she knows...that she was Polish. But on one occasion she approached Ms. Kulczycka, who was a Polish scholar, and she gave her a letter which she wrote to her mother in order for Ms. Kulczycka to check if she wrote it in proper Polish. So Ms. Kulczycka looks at her, what does it mean? So she says that she is Polish. If she wrote to her mother in Russian, her mother would have thrown this letter to the garbage. So that's why she had to write in Polish. But this **Finczenia** behaved quite all right. And Ms. Kulczycka was so-called "**zavieduiushcha po uchebnyi chkhas**" (RUSSIAN: a manager of learning time), a

principal was this one, and **Feruś [Ferusz]** was his assistant. Most likely that's right, I think so, I think so.

[01:] 20:05:06 – [01:] 22:57:08
20:48 – 23:47

A: Yes, Mr. Zbyszek?

[male voice]

A: Yes.

Q: And do you remember the outbreak of war between Germans and Soviets here?

[main interviewee]

A: Excuse me?

Q: How the German-Soviet war broke up?

A: Oh, I remember very well, you know, it was—

Q: What day was it?

A: It was Sunday, I wake up, we wake up at two in the morning—because we were thrown out from our rooms at the pharmacy and later they sent us to the attic, there were those two little rooms there and that's where we lived with these teachers and also a maid was with us, so the four of us lived there—some sort of bang, some incredible noises, so—and we had a balcony—so I go on the balcony and look. It's still grayish, because it was two in the morning, and I see how people wander around, and there was a lot of Jews everywhere, because *[unclear]* it was a district where Jews lived. And I see how they walk half-conscious and I asked what happened? **Voina** (RUSSIAN: war), meaning it was a suspicion that the war broke up. We got dressed and went where? Well, we went to doctor Ciwiń... Meaning doctor and Mrs. Cywińscy lived near the hospital, they were, like you were saying, my friends. There was doctor Cywiński with his wife and two daughters. One was retarded, and one was an agrarian engineer. So where, we are going to their place. And **vtoroi sekretar Partii** (RUSSIAN: second Party secretary), **Krabań [Khraban]** lodged with them and he had a wife, a very nice woman, and so we went there to find out something and I see such a picture: he was in the kitchen—there was no bathroom—so he was in the kitchen washing himself in a basin, but you could see his head down to here *[she shows how far down the man was seen]* through this little curtain, and he laughs at us so: **“Vot takoi obrazovannyi narod v tej dzielnica [unclear], ty doctor—**(RUSSIAN, some words are Polish: Look, such an educated population in this district, you are a doctor), how was it, how was it that he, that they couldn't believe that Germans declared war against Russia. And he laugh...Bowls with laughter. Well, we had to take it. And in the meantime it exploded, meaning

a bomb exploded just near this place where we were, it hit some kind of a barn or a shed with a horse in it, it killed the horse and destroyed the building. Well, it was incredible what was happening. And so in a little while a soldier comes, he comes to this **Krabań**, to this Party secretary and say...and whispers something to his ear. And his face fell and he left.

[01:] 22:57:08 - [01:] 26:01:02

23:47 – 26:58

- A: The wife of the doctor comes in and says that the war broke up. And his wife comes in, “**voina**” (RUSSIAN: war), because this soldier came to say that there were wounded soldiers, that it’s, that Germans were firing from across Bug. It was like that. And later all these folks got on the cars and all these folks were fleeing. And Germans came to us already at three in the afternoon, already there were, on the bridge, there were motorcycles, Germans on motorcycles.
- Q: At three in the afternoon?
- A: At three in the afternoon. And I was escaping—
- Q: But was it still on Sunday?
- A: Still on that same Sunday. They—because we still had—because ladies went with doctor’s wife and the teachers, and one of doctor’s daughters, they went to the village, to a kind of a settlement near Brańsk. And I was not allowed to go, because I had to be in the pharmacy. First they wanted to send me on the motorcycle somewhere to get some, something, I don’t remember what, but somehow I weaseled out of it and I stayed in the pharmacy. And later when the front was already here, when the front line was approaching, it was empty, and I and our maid were escaping together, and—we were escaping to the same settlement—and Germans were already on the bridges. Already on the first day. And later there was battle right here, at, at **Domanowo** [**Domanowo, Domanów**], it was already later, on the second or third day. And there was also firing near the cemetery. And later this front line became somehow, aha, later we escaped to the village and we were coming to town from there. You know, everything begins to mix up in my memory.
- Q: And when Germans came here for a second time, meaning, when they came during the war with Russians—
- A: You know, then it was—
- Q: What kind of order did they implement?
- A: You know, in general, when they came, at that time they looked rather like saviors, because after all, there were deportations. On Friday, on Friday before the war broke up—the war broke up on Sunday—and on Friday there was a deportation from Brańsk.
- Q: And the deportations were by train?

A: Excuse me?

Q: The deportations were by train or how?

A: By cars.

Q: By cars?

A: By cars to Bielsko and from there already by train.

Q: Were many people deported from Brańsk?

A: Well, quite a bit went. It's hard for me to say—

[01:] 26:01:02 – [01:] 28:04:16

26:58 – 29:07

A: How many were there, but in any case, many families were deported. Among others Mrs. Płońska with—and she was so close to us. So he, she was taken, the father was arrested and put into bunker, and they were deported, meaning Mrs. Płońska, two daughters and a son. And I saw how they drove them in this bu...in this bus..., not a bus, it was a car without a canvas cover and them on the top, and I see them how they this, and their horrifying shouts when they were passing by and saw us on the balcony. It was two days before this outbreak in [19]41.

Q: And what happened to them later?

A: They came back, came back in [19]46 or [19]45?

[male voice]

A: In [19]46.

[main interviewee]

A: They came back in [19]46. And their father was just being escorted by Jews, the police was escorting them and they shot them next to a building. And this Płoński was shot among the others. They didn't know that their father was dead, they found out only when they came back. And they were deported to Kazakhstan.

Q: And did you see how this old man, how they were escorting this Płoński?

A: I saw it, I saw it, because somehow, I don't know, I was standing on the balcony and I saw just how they were taking him from this bunker—after all it's here, it's here, near by *[she points her hand to the right]* it was where now—and I saw how they were taking him from the bunker to, to this where he was later shot.

Q: And how do you know that they were Jews?

A: Because I know who was leading them, this **Trus** was there among others, but there was also a Byelorussian, what was his name?

[01:] 28:04:16 – [01:] 30:57:20
29:07 – 32:08

A: *[unclear]*

[male voice]

A: Koniuch.

A: Koniuch? I think so.

Q: And tell me, when these deportations took place, whom were they deporting?

A: People who had some connections with the area across Bug, who, either somebody went across Bug, or had some contact there. Because there were such families that, let's say, father went across Bug, or the son went across Bug. Simply, they were either trading or escaping, because they had, because they were afraid. So, in any case, this kind of people. Or from intelligentsia. Here, **Rzepi [Żepi]** for example, who was a school principal. He was across Bug, so they deported his wife and daughter. With Płońskis it was probably because, they didn't have anybody there, but there were some, some misunderstandings among Jews.

Q: Meaning?

A: *[she nods her head]*

[male voice]

A: Płoński was the only Pole who could successfully compete with the local merchants before the war.

[main interviewee]

A: Because they had a shop. One had a store, the other a butcher store, and they were so, well, in terms of trade they could have been a competition. Yes.

Q: And were they also deporting Byelorussians?

A: I mean, maybe they were deporting them, but not here, because they were not here. Almost.

Q: And were they deporting Jews?

A: I mean *[unclear]* they weren't known to us.

Q: And were they deporting any Jews?

A: Jews? No. Was there somebody, no?

[male voice]

A: There was, yes.

[main interviewee]

A: Yes. I don't know this.

[male voice]

A: Two families and one single person.

[main interviewee]

A: Yes? Than I don't know about it.

Q: And when Germans came here, when this war broke out, what order did they establish? You said that they were really greeted with relief.

A: Well, maybe it wasn't literally greeting, only one thought to himself, thank God that they came because, because we would be deported. Meaning, please don't misunderstand me, but the fact that we escaped deportation, well, it was because of them.

Q: Because, you know, I heard in various places that as much as Jews were greeting Soviets with flowers in [19]39, Poles greeted Germans with flowers in [19]41.

**[01:] 30:57:20 – [01:]35:14:23
32:08 – 36:35**

A: I don't remember anybody here greeting them with flowers. But that, that there was some kind of relaxed feeling, that's true. But I don't know if they greeted them with flowers here, I can't say, because I didn't see it.

Q: And what was happening later, after Germans came?

A: Well, they were organizing work—

Q: Pharmacy, what happened with the pharmacy?

A: Well, pharmacy came into my hands. It was very much destroyed, because we, we were away for four weeks when this front was here, wait a minute, am I mixing something up—I am sorry, I

mixed up [19]44, already after Germans. Then it was very badly damaged. And this time, **Chomski** simply came, handed over what was you know, and I started. At the beginning I was managing pharmacy unofficially, but later, well, few months later, a representative from Białystok came, representative of pharmaceutical board, and he handed pharmacy over to me as a, despite the fact that I was only a student, after two years of studies.

Q: And was it a Polish pharmaceutical board?

A: No, it was German.

Q: So it was a German who came?

A: German, German, yes. Meaning he was an envoy from this pharmaceutical board, and in...and this pharmaceutical board was located in Białystok, it was **Von Storm [Von Shtorm]** who was heading it. And we were dependent on him. They had a very good warehouse, because, because, medical supply was good than, at that time. Medication was relatively inexpensive in comparison to the overall prices.

Q: And what happened with **Chomski**?

A: **Chomski** simply left when this, and later was taken away as a—he simply stayed in the ghetto.

A: And when was a ghetto established here?

A: Ghetto probably in [19]42. Because liquidation was in [19]43, yes?

[male voice]

A: In [19]42, in November.

[main interviewee]

A: Yes?

Q: But in any case, many months passed before ghetto was established, yes?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And what was happening with local Jews?

A: What they were doing. They organized here this, ghetto and the...right after the liquidation most likely, you know, I am getting all mixed up. Because later on there were young people in the ghetto and they were doing road works, how was it?

[male voice]

A: It was, it was already Polish youth, after the liquidation of the ghetto.

[main interviewee]

A: Ah, it was after the liquid...right, after the liquidation of the ghetto. Aha, yes, you're right.

Q: But this **Chomski**, did he have his supply store before the ghetto was established, during all those months? Did you see him every now and then?

A: You know, I mean we didn't quarrel, but we weren't really in touch. Because I can't say anything bad about him as such, only that, that he became a manager, when he wasn't supposed to be one. But besides that he behaved decently.

Q: And when Germans were already reigning here, but ghetto was not established yet, you were saying that you lived there, in Jewish district, where Jews were living.

A: You know it was a house, a house whose owner was a Jew, this **Szapiro [Shapiro]**. He had one house where he lived and next to it there was a second house, where the pharmacy was located. Meaning my brother-in-law was renting from him. And there we, there was an apartment, there were, wait a minute, four rooms with a kitchen, and an attic, where we later lived, when they threw us out, so it was an apartment and a pharmacy in this house. So this pharmacy was there, in this house till [19]62.

Q: All—

File 2 of 3

00:36-37:32

[02:] 00:42:20 - [02:] 03:01:03

00:36 – 03:00

Q: You were saying that **Szapiro** was the owner of this house where the pharmacy was located.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you know him?

A: Yes. We had very nice relationship, because, sure, he was the owner, but there was no reason—anyway he was a very decent man, very solid and considered a very solid citizen of Brańsk. Anyway, they were affluent people, he had, wait a minute, he had two sons. And his daughter was already married and already lived somewhere else, and they lived here, right next to us and I cooperated with his son very nicely, because, if something, if there was something to be taken care of, or to do, there was always **Lejpko [Lejbko]** i **Lejpko** always took care of things. When he needed something, I took care of it for him and when I needed something, then he did it for me. It was a young man, very energetic, very, well, kind also, so our relations were very kindly.

Q: But when Germans came here, what happened to this **Szapiro**?

A: I mean, at the beginning Jews were not doing so badly, but later, when they isolated them in the ghetto, they completely isolated the pharmacy—where the street was and all this street was Jewish, and here, yes, the pharmacy was separated by two meter fence, and behind us, there was still a house, two houses, where Jews lived. So, we were simply separated within the ghetto.

Q: Like an island?

A: An island, yes.

Q: And one could simply enter the pharmacy through the ghetto?

A: No. I mean the pharmacy faced the street, and one entered it from the street. But the entire subsidiaries were fenced off.

Q: It means you could see from the pharmacy what was going on in the ghetto?

A: I mean, there was a two meter fence, so one wasn't very curious what was going on there.

[02:] 03:01:03 - [02:] 06:00:11

03:00 – 06:07

A: But when they closed the ghetto, we didn't know that it was closed, that something was going on over there. Only at night somebody was knocking from this, from the kitchen. So I come out, and see **Lejpko** and so he says that they are closed in the ghetto—one could hear kind of shots, kind of something, but it sounded like some kind of knocking, we didn't know what was going on—and he says that every...that the ghetto is closed, surrounded, and that they are locked in. And that they will probably deport them, but it was only a suspicion. And so he says to me: "Maybe I, that I could take his parents and hide them in the basement" I say: "Sir, we are isolated in the ghetto, after all this building as such is not a guarantee, what if they come, start searching and

find them in the basement? I have nothing against it, but when they find them, then they are finished and we are finished.”

Q: Uhmm.

A: And so this is how we parted. After some—at the time when he was knocking, I didn’t know about it, about what was going on, so I sort of didn’t realized, but later, when he knocked for the second time, already later, at night, I felt really very uneasy. Because by then one already knew what was going on and what the danger was. So, of course, I let him in and they, meaning, they wanted to make a hiding place in the household building. It was where, it stood along the fence and the wall, the outside wall faced the ghetto, and the entrance was on the pharmacy grounds. I say: “Sir, what you will do in the household building that’s your business. I will not be responsible for that, do what you want.” And what they did, they, there was wood there, few wooden rails, so they removed two rails and made a hiding place there. And we just took them, we had this, so she was taking them food, so they, you know. This closing of the ghetto, I remember it was on All Saints Day, and it was around the beginning of the week, and their deportation was on Saturday, I also remember this. So this closing lasted about a week.

Q: So short, the ghetto closed for a week only?

A: When it was surrounded, yes. It wasn’t longer than, it was about a week.

Q: And tell me, before they closed the ghetto, did Germans persecuted Jews somehow before the ghetto was closed?

A: How should I know—they managed somehow.

[02:] 06:00:11 - [02:] 08:58:08
06:07 – 09:12

A: They probably paid them some kind, they paid them something, but I don’t know, I don’t want to talk about it because I don’t know.

Q: In any case, you didn’t see anything special?

A: I mean, for example such moment, when they were already locked in, when they closed the ghetto, there was this **Grynszapan [Greenspan]**, his name was **Grynszpan** and he was an electrician and was fixing electrical lines. And he came to the pharmacy and says give me a poison because he can’t take it anymore. I say: “You think somebody would give you a poison?” But in any case—and most likely he committed suicide, I don’t know how, but I most likely he did.

Q: But how do you know?

A: I mean, people simply talked, that he wasn't deported, and—because when they were deporting, they would—

Q: And what about these, these people who hid in this household building?

A: Yes, in this—meaning who was there. Two sons and a fiancée of one of them.

Q: And a father?

A: No, only these three were in this, in this. And the father was deported just at that time when they ordered, I don't remember, a lot, maybe 200 horse wagons, right?

Q: And how, how were they hiding. In this household building, right?

A: Right.

Q: You were saying it was the maid who was bringing them things?

A: Yes. Yes, because she—

Q: And how many times a day?

A: How many times, when they asked for something or something like that, than, well, we simply gave them enough in order that they could, they could sustain themselves.

Q: And weren't you afraid that the maid can say something?

A: No. No. The maid was a decent, decent maid. I mean, she was young, she was my age at that time, I was 20-21 years old. And so was she, the same year as I.

Q: And how much did they pay for this food?

A: They didn't pay anything. How would it be, a man tries to, nobody talked about it. But when they were leaving, they were forcing money on me, I can't say, but I say: "My dear people, you will need this money." Anyway, when they were already leaving, I wanted them to leave as soon as possible, so the Germans would not see them here. But I can't say, there were such instincts

to, I say: "Go with God, reach a place you need to reach, hide there, and when it comes to money, you will need them." So it—

Q: And where did they go?

A: I mean they had arranged a farmer whom they were supposed to contact and they were supposed to stay with him. It was necessary to contact him, so priest **Hwalko [Chwalko]** went to these, in the settlement, as they told him, and simply put them in touch.

[02:] 08:58:08 - [02:] 11:00:18
09-12 – 11:20

A: When they deported them, they were deporting on Saturday, so they left our place on Thursday. I remember such order—

Q: On Thursday before deportation?

A: No, after—those were taken away on Saturday and these were in this hiding place for some time, you know, and they left on Thursday, as the priest arranged it: that they will cross, meaning from the pharmacy, across the road, and here, near the church, there was a road to Popławy, to the bridge to Popławy, so they were supposed to meet near the bridge. The farmer was supposed to wait for them and they were supposed to get there. So in the evening they went through the pharmacy and it was when they were forcing this money on me, and I say: "People, have mercy, go with God and, and, and—"

Q: And what kind of money did they have?

A: Maybe even dollars, but I really don't know because it was so—

Q: But paper or gold?

A: Paper. Paper.

Q: And what happened with them later?

A: And they went to this settlement, they got lost for a bit, but still contacted this farmer, and they stayed at this settlement, how long, they stayed there for a year and a half. Because up till the front came [19]44.

Q: And what happened to them after that?

A: After that they left this hiding place. There were also some attempts at them over there—there were also some incidents. Later on the father was arrested, because the whole family lived there, so the Germans came, they arrested the father, because they were searching for Jews, but they didn't find them, because they were in some double wall and they didn't find them, but the father was in prison.

Q: This farmer, right?

A: This farmer, right, Popławski. And later they, it passed somehow and when the front came, in [19]44, then they came out.

Q: But what, someone denounced that they are hiding, that this Popławski is hiding or what?

[02:] 11:00:18 -- [02:] 14:12:21

11:20 – 14:40

A: There were complaisant people, who—but I don't want to talk about it, because I don't know. But in any case, something like that happened there. But they were sitting there half...no, no, not only there. Because when the father was arrested, they moved them somewhere, somewhere near Ciechanowiec, I don't remember the name, I don't remember. This man was coming to me—

Q: This Popławski?

A: Not Popławski, but the second one who was hiding them for some time. Because they were simply afraid to keep them when Germans came, did the search, arrested the father, so they were afraid to keep them. So then they sent them to their cousins or friends, somewhere near Bikry, somewhere there. I don't remember the name, I don't want to distort—

Q: And what about them, did they survive the war, these **Szapiros**?

A: They survived. Survived. And at the beginning they started trading and traded too much and they gave them high taxes to pay, and instead of paying, they escaped. First they moved to Białystok, aha, because in the meantime, there was, well, this unpleasant incident, because two Jewish women and the farmer woman who was hiding them were killed, because she, they came to her and were asking about them, they killed these two Jewish women, apparently they said that they came to a seamstress for measuring, but it was obvious that it was this, and—I think that it wasn't—in any case they shot these two Jewish women, and this farmer woman who was hiding them, she apparently came out and recognized the man who did it and called his name and he turned around and killed her.

Q: But where was it?

- A: In Brańsk.
- Q: In Brańsk? But it was already after the war?
- A: It was already after this, this front passed, yes—
- Q: And what was the name of this farmer woman?
- A: Excuse me?
- Q: What was the name of this farmer woman?
- A: **Sztejmanowa, Sztejman** [*the form of the name signifies that the woman was married Sztejman, Steinman*].
- Q: And she was shot, yes?
- A: Yes.
- Q: But who did it anyway?
- A: Well, I don't know who did it, but in any case, I don't know, partisans or someone else, in any case, I can't say that it was commendable.
- Q: And these Jewish women, who were they?
- A: One was a German scholar—there was this Tykocki here, he, he was an affluent Jew and she was his sister. She studied German literature, but who was with her, this second woman, I don't know.
- Q: Was her name Tykocka, or did she have a married name?
- A: Tykocka, yes. Because she, because he was her brother. And their daughter [*door bell*], daughter of these Tykockis was baptized. She was in this, in **Chodyszów [Chodyszów, Chodyszewo]** and she was baptized. Later, when this, later she died, she got sick and died.

[02:] 14:12:21 – [02:] 17:05:09
14:40 – 17:40

- Q: And were this Tykocka and this other Jewish woman from Brańsk?

A: From Brańsk.

Q: And during the war were they hiding here, in Brańsku?

A: Most likely. I don't know where they were, but— *[door bell]*

Q: One second, all right, I will take your mike off—

Q: Well you remember everything very well. We will continue it in a moment, but—how did you know about this incident at **Sztejmanowa**?

A: Because it was very well known case, because a murder of two...three people. Shooting, and in after all in Brańsk.

Q: And do you remember what time of a year it was?

A: It was in spring, I think. Yes. Yes, yes, around March, something like that—

Q: March of what year?

A: [19]45 most likely.

Q: So it was almost entire year after the front passed through here, right?

A: Yes, because it didn't happen right away. Oh, you see—

Q: So, these two Jewish women simply lived at **Sztejmanowa**—

A: I mean, they simply went there to hide. Because there were these—there was animosity towards Jews, of course. And they—yes, perhaps that's why. They organized themselves and there was around 80 Jews from different places, not only from Brańsk.

Q: Meaning?

A: It means that simply, wherever there were Jews, they brought them here and there were around 80 people in Brańsk's territory.

Q: But did they live together, in one place, or what?

- A: Well, they lived in Brańsk, because there were these houses left by Jews. And they *[unclear]*, wherever one could, that's where they lived.
- Q: But these houses left by Jews were already taken by new owners. So where did they live?
- A: Well, wait a minute. Well, when this **Szapiro** for example, came back, so he must have gone to his house. Aha —
- Q: And what, this house was standing empty since they took them away? Till the end of the war? Somebody must have lived there.
- A: You know, there was this, anyway, these boys, who, how was it called, Mr. Zbyszek will remember, lived there. And they did road works. So, they simply came back and somehow found places which weren't occupied. It was, wait a minute [19]44, [19]45 year.

[02:] 17:05:09 - [02:] 20:05:08
17:40 – 20:47

[male voice]

- A: These were **Junacy** ("Junacy" literally meaning "young men" most likely denotes an organization created for young men coming back from war in order to give them work, shelter, and often education).

[main interviewee]

- A: Junacy, yes. And they occupied this, well, exactly this, after the ghetto, this. Because you are asking how, where they came back to, because 80 people came back, 80 Jews were in Brańsk. You are asking where they lived. In different places, they took their old apartments.
- Q: And were there other incidents after the war similar to the one with Tykocka?
- A: When it comes to Jews?
- Q: Yes.
- A: No, most...most likely not.
- Q: And did you see how they were shot there, did you see it?
- A: No, no. I didn't go there. You know, these are the things, which, I think, shouldn't have taken place—the fact that she was Jewish doesn't mean that they should have killed her. If you kill somebody, if you judge somebody than I think, this person should face the charges, if he did

something wrong. But the bare fact that he is a Jew or this or that, this is not his fault, neither his valor or merit.

Q: And let's go back—

A: Aha, and later on, you know, after this murder, these **Szapirzy** immediately got—aha, not at that time yet. At that time they felt such awful fear that they can, if they are killing theses ones, they could also kill others. And then they started to lea...leave Brańsk gradually, mostly for Białystok. **Szapirzy** left for Białystok. **Szapirowie**. And others, well, everyone where they, wherever they could. Right?

Q: And this tax which you were talking about because they traded too well, did they get it here, in Brańsk?

A: Aha, and they, because he—at that time they were already in Białystok, I mixed things up. He was in Białystok at that time and traded on a large scale. And, I don't remember if it was salt or something else, but he was selling it by wagons, and doing it so craftily that he didn't pay taxes, so they gave him a large amount of taxes to pay and so he consi...he saw that there is no place for him here, that he has to pack his things and escape.

[02:] 20:05:08 – [02:] 21:59:10
20:47 – 23:52

A: And they, the brothers moved to Austria, and his wife—because later they got married, they, he, meaning **Lejpko** with this **Waserówna** [*the form of the name signifies that the woman was single* **Wasser, Wasserman**] of his, they got married and were a couple—she stayed for the time being. She was then expecting, I think—they went to Austria, and she stayed here for the time being. And later she joined them in Austria. But it was ugly, such ugly fact that while traveling—those train cars, you know how those journeys were, awful cars and awful rides. People were hanging from the cars. And she had two heavy suitcases and had to switch the trains somewhere while traveling there to her kin. And someone was so helpful, that he will help her—she, you know, pregnant with suitcases, so he will help her—and that was all she saw of these suitcases. She was all right, but the suitcases were stolen from her.

Q: And how do you know that?

A: I mean I know from them, because I was in touch with them.

Q: But, were they coming here or—

A: I mean I was at their place, in America, because later they got to America through Austria and later they wrote to me, they wrote to me, after all, I don't see, I didn't see the reason why we should quarrel or have some bad feelings towards each other. And so later they invited me to come to America. I say that it is only a dream, because I, I can't afford it and, and they wrote that they would cover the costs and in fact they cover the costs of the two way ticket and I was there visiting for two months. I went on November 25th and returned on February 4th. In [19]65 and [19]66, fourth of February.

Q: Are they still alive?

A: I mean, men are not alive, but women are. Because **Lejpko** was shoot—I was there twice—because I went once in [19]65 and once in [19]78. And then, in [19]78 it was a shorter visit, one and a half months. And some few months after I was there for the second time, well simply robbers came, because they lived in a villa district, and when I was there, there were four or five robberies in neighboring villas, but somehow they didn't come to them. And at that time, it was maybe a year or half a year after my leaving, he simply went out with the dog, went for a walk. And he comes back, and his wife was alone in the house. Someone was walking around the house, but she thought that it was **Lejpko**. Meanwhile, it turned out that there were two robbers.

[02:] 23:02:24 - [02:] 25:59:10
23:52 – 26:56

A: He came in, **Lejpko** came in, because they are not in a habit of locking the door there, so he came into this, this house and they, simply as caught robbers would, shot at him twice and killed this **Lejpko**. Also this, the second one, **Fajwel [Faiwel]**, the older one, he was really the owner of the house where the pharmacy was, well, this one simply died from illnesses, maybe not so much from old age, but what he went through, all this—

Q: And where in America did they live, in what city?

A: In Baltimore.

Q: And let's go back again to that night when they were closing the ghetto—

A: Yes.

A: And besides the fact that **Lejpko** came—

Q: Yes.

Q: I also wanted to ask how did you talk to him, when he was knocking on this wall? Was there any passage through this wall or what?

A: No, he simply came through the fence—

Q: He jumped over?

A: Aha, and when they locked them in, later on, at night Jews were walking around our yard, they knocked down wooden rails and made holes and walked around the yard. We had our house locked, right, and didn't let anyone in, and they could walk around. So he jum..., then he—at that time nothing was happening yet—so he simply jumped over the fence. And came to us. When he came first, he normally knocked at the kitchen door and I simply opened, because it could have been somebody coming to the pharmacy. And when he was knocking the second time, he was already knocking at the window and as I said, this was an uneasy feeling because I already realized what I was doing, because I was letting in somebody I should not have let in. But still, in any case, I let him in, because after all, it was a human being.

Q: And what else do you remember when they locked them in, in this ghetto, what was going on there? Did you see?

A: No, we didn't look. You know, there is one story, but it's better not to tell.

Q: But why, this is for documentation, you know, here already—it is only for the future generations, it's not for the generation which is alive now.

A: Well, you know, it's about how the people living on the opposite side behaved, I don't have any business in accusing them, and besides, they are already dead—

Q: Well, Mr. Zbyszek, tell us, because this is really only for the research, it's no use to, to—

[02:] 25:59:10 - [02:] 29:10:05
26:56 – 30:15

[male voice]

A: Well, I did not witness this incident, I only know it from others and, well—

Q: But my point is simply that you don't have to be afraid of anything when you are talking here, because this is really, someone may use it in 20, 50 years.

[main interviewee]

A: Well, I can't say it is a nice moment—

Q: Yes—

A: Which would testify. Well, what were they doing? And later on someone denounced them and showed it—

Q: But on the opposite side of this street where, where—

A: I mean our side was a ghetto, and the opposite side was not.

Q: Yes—

A: And where you exited our place, so a little bit diagonally, towards, towards the church, there was a street to the church and then a little street to Popławy, to the river and to the village of Popławy.

Q: And what was the name of this street?

A: This street didn't have any name, because it was only a little passage. A passage downhill from the street. So, it wasn't a street, only—

[male voice]

A: A route of escaping ghetto and out of the, the city.

Q: And so, so—

[main interviewee]

A: What, is it worth talking about?

[male voice]

A: This is your relation.

Q: It's worth it, it's worth it, don't be afraid, because it is really for future generations, nothing unpleasant will happen.

[main interviewee]

A: Well, it doesn't show these people in a good light.

Q: You know how it is during the war: there are good and bad people. We want to hear about everything. What was going on there?

A: You know, first, I didn't see it, because I was busy in the pharmacy. Aha, still on the second day after the ghetto was closed, so it was All Saints Day, we want to go to the church. We are coming out, the maid came out to open the shutters. "**Halt**" (GERMAN: stop). In any case, the guard was patrolling the street, because it was the end of the ghetto, and he was walking along this and he saw that someone is coming out, **halt** with a gun. So she came back what to do. One of the teachers who knew German came out thinking she would explain to him. So she comes out, and he doesn't react, there is no way to talk to him, he only points his gun at her. Well, so we are sitting inside, and cannot go anywhere. And at some point, there is something going on in our yard. So I came out, there is a lieutenant from our gendarmerie well,, we knew our gendarmerie, and this guard. And there is some woman. A woman in this village kerchief wrapped around her looking exactly like a village woman. And he says that she is Jewish. I say: "I don't know who she is. She doesn't look like a Jewish woman."

[02:] 29:10:05 - [02:] 32:01:08
30:15 – 33:13

A: And this one, he moved his hand that she can go. And she stopped for a second for some reason and he asked me and I said that I didn't know, I didn't know her, but she didn't look Jewish. And you know, this second, when she hesitated, it was enough for them to take her to the police station. And later this gendarme said to me: "And she was Jewish after all." It turned out that it was a Jewish woman from **Świryt** [**Świryt**, **Świrytowo**] because when they were closing ghetto, they also took everybody from villages. And she said that she came to the dentist. And she was supposed to be at the dentist and that they locked her in the ghetto. And I said again that I didn't know, maybe she was really from the village, because she looked like that. And aft...and aft...meaning, they took her. And I say to the lieutenant what are we supposed to do, they don't let us open the shutters, they don't let us come out. So he explained the situation to this guard and then we could—we couldn't let anyone into the pharmacy, because we were responsible for this. And later, you know, at some point, I am alone in the pharmacy, and priest **Hwalko** was in the study, with the window facing the street. And he says: "Look what's going on." When the guard was walking in the opposite side of the ghetto, so at this time, someone, they were coming out of our yard, crossed the street and on the other side. And to **Popławy**. I looked at that and thought to myself, it is happening on my yard. But I don't have to know about it. And nothing, I am sitting quietly. And in this way seven or eight people escaped. And later somebody—

Q: During the day?

A: Excuse me?

Q: During the day?

A: Yes, it was during the day. And suddenly lieutenant from gendarmerie comes in, because someone, someone from the people, told him what was going on. So, of course, immediately a Gestapo man ran into the pharmacy and there was, in the pharmacy, there was a medic, who came to fill out the prescription and waited for it.

[02:] 32:01:08 – [02:] 36:09:18
33:13 – 37:32

A: How he rushed in, him and the lieutenant from our gendarmerie. And this, this medic is standing, and he rushes towards him, towards this medic and *[shows hitting movements with both hands]* and from one and from the other side. And I say to the lieutenant: “He is innocent, this is a medic from the hospital, he came to fill out the prescription and is waiting for it.” So he told the other one, so he left him, he left him be. And then they immediately nailed this gate *[shows with crossed hands how they nailed the gate]*, so no one can go through this gate from the back, only through the pharmacy. So we walked around for almost a month, it was so tightly closed. And these ones, were unfortunately taken back, meaning taken to the ghetto. Only this one from **Świryt** saved herself, because she calmly crossed to the other side and didn’t go to Popławy, but in the other direction, to the outskirts of Brańsk. And she was saved.

Q: And did you see who let Germans know about these people, yes?

A: Well, it’s better not to know.

[male voice]

A: Maybe not by name, but what kind of people they were.

[main interviewee]

A: Well, they lived on the opposite side, not very interesting ladies—but they are already dead, there is nothing to talk about, because there were two of them, they couldn’t communicate with the lieutenant, so they were showing him. But, unfortunately, they denounced.

Q: And after, when the ghetto was closed, were there any shootings there, did they hang people, were there any executions, do you remember?

A: Not just then. But shooting, yes. Meaning, deportation was on Sun...on Saturday, and later, a week later came this, simply three Gestapo men came and with them **Cukier [Zucker]**, who was the head of Judenrat. And they were doing searches and were looking—precisely this **Cukier** was showing Jewish hiding places. So the first search happened at our place. And so I am sit...priest **Hwalko** was there. We were, I don’t remember, we were doing something with bills and he was helping me. The teacher and the maid were somewhere else, and we were here. And

suddenly someone is banging on the door, meaning the entrance door, because there was this glass door and then the wooden one, locked with a bar. And there was a little window in it. And they are banging so brutally. So I think to myself, “God, I will show them how one should knock.” I simply thought that someone was coming to the pharmacy. I open the door [*imitates Gestapo man’s stretched neck*] and see a head of Gestapo man. “**Auf**” (GERMAN: out). So, what can I say, I open up, hold this bar and they come in, these Gestapo men, **Cukier**—I didn’t know yet that it was **Cukier**—and our gendarmerie and all of them crossed the expediting room and went to this, there was this small study.

Q: Ummm.

A: And I am standing there, near this.

Q: We have to—

File 3 of 3

00:37-33:02

[03:] 00:44:03 – [03:] 03:09:03

00:37 – 03:08

Q: So this Gestapo man enters the pharmacy—

A: Yes, and they went to this study and I—

Q: How many of them were there?

A: Three Gestapo men and **Cukier**, and also our gendarmerie, few of them. Aha, and in the meantime, when they already left, one of the ladies, Ms. Kulczycka, went to this building where they were hiding to see how things are, if she needed to clean up, and she comes back—it was a dark-skinned woman, with dark eyes—I see that these eyes sunk somewhere deep, that she is pale and I say, “What happened?” She says, “Listen, there are Jews there.” I say, “Where?” It turns out that there was a similar household building on the opposite side. Here stood one, ours, and there, where the wall of the other side of the ghetto was, there was a household building of the house on the other side. And when she went to ours, she heard some murmur, some voices and she got scared. And what happened. A Jew who lived next door, a neighbor, went into this other household building and was making noises with a stick, so she could hear him. And he says: “For God’s sake, give me at least some hot water or something”—it turns out that they were hiding there and, and we taking their things as well. And when they came, those from Gestapo with this, our maid was just making something for them. Luckily she didn’t go there yet.

And so, they went in to this, and the gendarmes ran into the yard and they called me. I went and this is how it looked: I stand here, I front of him, Mr. **Kapówna** stands viv a vis, on this side [*she points to the right*], he was tall, maybe not two, but close to two meters, with a whip in his hand, another one in plain clothes and one more, as it turned out, **Cukier**.

[03:] 03:09:03 - [03:] 06:21:03

03:08 – 06:28

Q: And you didn't know this **Cukier**?

A: No, I had nothing to do with him, but he was a head of Judenrat as a translator. And he says this to me. Aha, and priest **Hwalko** was also in this room. And he says: „Old Szapiro said that his sons are at your place, and if not, you know where they are.” I lost my head, I was then, how old, 21 and completely lost my head, because it was like this: the father denounces his sons. And who tells this, the head of Judenrat, it is beyond one's mind that Jews were denouncing on one another. And he automatically pronounces a death sentence on me, because if I collaborated with them, hid them, so it's obvious what threatened me. And, and I say: “Wińcia, do you know anything about Jews?” And she was so tall, very masculine type, she says: “I know nothing about Jews.” [*shakes her head to mean no*]. And at this point this Gestapo man immediately ordered search and Ms. **Kapówna** went with the gendarmes around the house, and they took me to the yard, where they were hiding. And so, aha, one of the gendarmes went somewhere and found footprints on the snow, and he says: “Somebody was here.” I say: “How do I know if somebody was here? In order to know that someone was here you need to put a guard here. I cannot be responsible for that.” And this Gestapo man in plain clothes says: “Don't ask her anything, because she will not tell you anything anyway.” And so—

Q: Did he speak German?

A: German.

Q: Do you speak German?

A: I mean, more or less, enough to communicate with them. And this **Cukier** went into this household building and he shouts, **Lejpko**, **Fajwel**, talks to them, but there was no answer. And it was all in disarray, God was watching over us, because under all this was their suitcase, of which we didn't know, because we didn't go there. But they were not there, luckily they didn't find anybody, and so they were leaving. And when they were leaving, this **Cukier** comes up to me and says: “I now that you know where they are. **Lejpko** and **Waserówna** can do what they want, but **Fajwel** should come to his wife, because his wife asked—“ Aha, why this **Fajwel** was here, because he came to visit his father and his wife's mother was seriously ill and she stayed with her mother and her daughter.

[03:] 06:21:03 - [03:] 09:00:03

06:28 – 09:14

- A: So his wife said that what they have to face, they should face together. And this is how they left. So, I am saying, he simply didn't realize what he was doing. Because I was later asked that he denounced them. I say: "All right, he denounced, but after all he was also shot" All in all he denounced 70 people.
- Q: And how do you know that 70 people?
- A: Because later they were taking them away and shot them here, in Kirkut. So it wasn't a secret, it was a well known thing.
- Q: Did you see how they were taking them away?
- A: I saw these horse wagons, it was a horrible sight, because horse wagons were standing, and there were also those two together, because they put them in a bunker and kept them together. And they were two Catholics, one who went to ghetto for pots or something, I don't know why he went there, in any case he went for something and they caught him and put into the bunker. And the second one, he was throwing Jewish bedding over the fence unceremoniously, during the day. And they also arrested him. And, one of them could escape, because someone said: "Listen, run away, maybe—" And this one said: "For what, I didn't do anything so why would I run away." And they shot them together, together with Jews they shot them.
- Q: Those Catholics, yes?
- A: Those Catholics, yes. And, well, and—
- Q: And—
- A: These horse wagons were standing and they loaded people on them. We didn't know what or where, in any case, later on it came out, right, that they took them to Kirkut, out of the city and that they shot these 72 people there. And on the same day when they shoot them, in the evening the fire broke up. Despite the fact that he showed these hiding places, there were more. And our neighbors, our Jews, they came out when this fire broke out, crossed through our yard, still asked for something so we did it, and they crossed the street and went to the village. But I don't think they survived there. But, in any case, they were not shot here. And there were two gendarmes during this fire, this one **Martin [Marten]**, who killed six or eight people there. There was also some child there, well, in any case, those who were hiding so long, they didn't have water, they didn't have hot water, she wanted to boil some water and started a fire.

[03:] 09:00:03 - [03:] 10:59:19

[09:14 – 11:18

A: And the fire broke up and because of it people came out of their hiding places and that's how this gendarme shot maybe eight people.

Q: But did you see that?

A: No. I didn't go there. But it's a fact that they shot them.

Q: Was it near you?

A: I mean, maybe a 100 meters from us.

Q: On the same street?

A: Yes. Yes, because we were at the end of the ghetto, and that was somewhere here where there is, a bit diagonally, a bit further in.

Q: And do you remember the day when it all happened, what day was it?

A: It was Monday, when they took them away and shot in Kirkut, it was Monday.

Q: And how many—

A: Because they came—

Q: And how many days after the deportation was it?

A: They took them away on Saturday, on Thursday these people left us, and on Sunday they came to search us.

Q: So in a week, a week and one day, eight days after the deportation.

A: Yes. Yes. Because they were deporting them on Saturday, on Sunday they were going around, because Jews were in bunkers, in the forest, there were different hiding places. And he was uncovering everybody. He knew, as a head of Judenrat, he knew. And he denounced them all. So, I say, when Marzyński was making a movie, when you are talking about our bad sides, why don't you say about their bad sides. And I, for example, I don't believe that he was consciously denouncing. He simply thought, as he said, whatever happens to them, let it happen to all of

them together. Because they were supposed to take them, at least this is what they were saying, they were supposed to take them to Białystok's ghetto. And he believed it. And that this, after all they shot him too.

[03:] 10:59:19 - [03:] 14:03:06

11:18 – 14:30

A: So you can't say that it was some special collaboration, it's—you have to live through it yourself in order to, to talk about it.

Q: And when they were taking Jews from these hiding places—

A: Yes.

Q: Any local people were there too?

A: Probably not. Probably not. It was him who was simply going around, taking them everywhere and, and showed them. Because I was just thinking that father would denounce his own children? And he is also a head of something, so he is also this someone, right? They simply didn't realiz... Despite all, despite the fact that everybody knew about it, they simply couldn't realize it. After all it was hard to believe that what, that they will take thousands of people and do what they did? It's beyond one's mind.

Q: And when it was all happening and this deportation—

A: Yes.

Q: Because I haven't asked you about it yet, how did it take place?

A: They simply took them, I don't know if, if, but I seem to think, I seem to have heard that there was 240 horse wagons. For deportation. So they simply sat them on this and they were walking, walking, meaning they were escorting, and so they drove them like that to this Bielsko.

Q: But did it all happen by surprise, or did they announce earlier that they will be deporting?

A: No, I mean they locked them in, but I supposed they knew, because when this **Lejtko** came to us, he said that they were surrounded, which we didn't know, that they were surrounded and they would probably be taking them away.

Q: Ummm.

A: I mean, it was at the beginning, when he came on the first evening, when they surrounded them.

Q: And were there any incidents when they were taking them away?

A: No, I don't think so. I don't remember, I can't recall anything.

Q: And how many Germans guarded this, this whole deportation?

A: I don't know either. But I don't think many. But, you know, when he is walking with a gun, so what is it? I heard some voices that farmers—this farmer, when he was driving, he was mainly afraid for his horse and his wagon. Because it was—that they could help, that they could this, but how could they help? After all, he was, he had to do what he was ordered. When they had guns, so how he could protest it. Even if there weren't many of them, because I also heard such opinion, that there were few of them, and if they, if they helped—well, one can say this, maybe if, but one should had to be there and lived through it.

[03:] 14:03:06 - [03:] 17:00:13

14:30 – 17:34

Q: And during this deportation, or later, during this, this uncovering of hiding places, did you see anybody killed here?

A: No. No. Because it was, you know, they came, one was so devastated by this whole search and all this evil that—and later I still had this, later still came, it must have been a month after it, my, I am sorry, it was an SS man, the highest Party member in Bielsko, in the district. And that it reached him these things, that, that here, and I say that I don't know anything, ha, ha.

Q: And what things reached him?

A: Excuse me?

Q: What reached him?

A: Well, that there was a search here, that there was something with Jews. But it was a horrible moment when he sits in the armchair all [*shows how the SS man was sitting in the chair*] and screams at me. Such, you know, inhuman treatment. This, you know, you had to live through this to know what it was.

Q: And you were saying that when they were doing the search, that **Lejpko** with his **Waserówna** and **Fajwel**, they were already gone, yes?

A: Yes. Yes. They went on Thursday—

Q: Yes.

A: And went to this settlement and this was on Sunday.

Q: But you said that they left a suitcase, yes?

A: I didn't know anything about this suitcase. And their things were in it and later they sent for it, and we sent it to them. And in the house there was a suitcase too, because they were hiding somewhere there and we also didn't know about it—

Q: But they sent for these things?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And whom did they send?

A: Someone from these farmers. Because there were entire families, you know.

Q: And tell me, this priest, what was his name, **Hwalko**, who was here during this search, how come he was there?

A: He was our friend and he often visited us. And so he came to visit, I think we ate dinner together, later ladies went away, and he was, I don't remember, I think we were taking care of some bills—

Q: So he simply happened to be there, because I thought that he was living in this house.

A: No, no, no. At that time he wasn't.

Q: And tell me, do you know Jack Rubin?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Do you know Jack Rubin?

A: Yes. Oh, you know, Rubin, I liked what he said. He said this: "I don't know if I would be so, so good. I was buying life, and they were selling life. I don't know if I would be so good."

[03:] 17:00:13 - [03:] 20:03:03
17:34 – 20:44

Q: You said—

A: He literally said that to me.

Q: Did you meet Rubin when he came here after the war or did you know him before?

A: You know, I kne...I knew few people, only that one lived with somebody, but I wasn't close with anybody. But later—aha, when I went to America, they greeted me with a big, big pomp. Everyone from Brańsk who was there came to the airport to greet me. So, I can't say, they behaved very nicely. And they gave me the opportunity to visit places. I was in New York, later, when I was there for the second time, I went to Niagara Falls. They say this: "God grant good guests." Because they are very, well, they want to see things, but they are simply overworked and don't have time for that. And when they have a good guest, they have to take him places, show him things, and they also get a chance to see something.

Q: Ma'am—

A: After all, it's very good.

Q: You received a medal of Righteous Among the Nations—

A: Yes.

Q: And this was in connection with what?

A: With, with **Szapiros**.

Q: For this, this help you gave them.

A: Yes. Because, the fact that they survived was really—if one wouldn't help them, if they didn't have this shelter here, then they would have been taken away, like the rest, and they would not have survived.

Q: And do you know if after this deportation, there were Jews hiding here, in Brańsk?

A: They were hiding.

Q: A lot?

A: Well, now you hear about this or the other. They were hiding, yes. And people were giving them, giving them food. Some, simply out of fear were taking it to the field, or somewhere. There were such incidents.

Q: What do you mean, they were taking food to the fields?

A: Because if somebody came from the fields, they were saying different things, only—

Q: But they were saying this during the war or now?

A: I mean, later on, when one could speak, because there was a period of time when you couldn't admit to this at all.

Q: Mr. Zbyszek, you were saying that how many Jews survived occupation in Brańsk?

[male voice]

A: 67. In Brańsk and vicinity. Jews from Brańsk.

Q: Uhhh. Excuse me, so you said 67 Jews from Brańsk, yes.

A: Yes.

Q: And this is, this is a lot comparing to other places?

A: Yes, comparing with neighboring towns, it was definitely more, few times more than in other towns of similar population.

Q: Uhhh.

[03:] 20:03:03 – [03:] 23:07:08

20:44 – 23:56

A: Even larger towns hid lesser number of Jews.

Q: So, it means that many people in this parts helped Jews. And do you know about people who denounced Jews? Like these two women across the street who showed the lieutenant.

[main interviewee]

A: You know, they were various, but these are—this one told the other, the other told the next one, so I can't say anything for sure. Naturally, there were different stories and I think, that unfortunately, there were facts that should not have taken place.

Q: I mean, you heard something as a gossip?

A: Yes.

Q: And what kind of gossips were there, that for example, someone showed a hiding place, or—

A: Or that someone was killed. But, you know, it's hard to say when you didn't see it.

Q: I understand, but these, there were gossips that—

A: Various ones, various malice, or for example, well, they denounced, when this little girl was left behind and they gave her to—because a gendarme came and saw and denoun...someone must have said something, or maybe they saw something not, not right. Well this Zawadzki, they took this little girl, she was maybe five years old.

[male voice]

A: It was a boy.

[main interviewee]

A: A boy? And they killed him.

Q: And they were not taken?

A: No, no, they only took a child.

Q: And you were saying that someone was killed? What was this gossip?

A: Well, this gossip that those who came out of our yard, that they were found somewhere, in a ditch, killed.

Q: And that it wasn't Germans?

A: No, that these were, well—

Q: So only this one, the one you saw in this kerchief who went in the opposite direction. She didn't go where everybody else went.

A: Yes. She bravely went. She crossed the street and went in the opposite direction. She didn't go where everybody else went.

Q: Were there other gossips about these things?

A: Oh, not really.

Q: And when the ghetto stood empty, you were saying that two people were arrested, because they, one came to take something—

A: It was at the beginning—

Q: The second one came to take something—

A: It was at the beginning. And later **Junacy** lived there, right?

[male voice]

A: Uhmm. It was a work camp for **Junacy**.

[main interviewee]

A: Yes, work camp.

Q: Uhmm.

A: A German was also killed. It was partisans who killed this German.

[male voice]

A: The commandant of the camp.

[main interviewee]

Q: But for some time it had to be empty—

A: Empty.

Q: So people were surely going there, because wherever there were empty ghettos people were going there.

[03:] 23:07:08 – [03:]26:00:18

23:56 – 26:57

A: Well yes, you know, it was just—

Q: It was only that one heard something—

A: Yes, but I was trying to be as far away from it as possible.

Q: Uhmm. And already after the war, you were saying that there was some Jewish society. Or did you say a Jewish center, those 80 Jews who were here.

A: I mean, they simply, when it was all already finished, in [19]44, so they, those who had houses here or something came back and they were gathering others, you know, like it is with Jews. Jews always gather together. All in all it was about 80 people.

Q: And they lived, they lived near each other?

A: Well, they lived in this ghetto, right? It's hard for me to say where they lived, because **Szapiros** lived in their house, next to the old pharmacy.

Q: And did you hear anything else about some Jews being killed besides these two Jewish women whom you talked about?

A: I mean, in Brańsk, I don't think so—I was then in Łódź, I was finishing my studies—so, I don't know what his name was—

[male voice]

A: **Finkelsztajn [Finkelstein]**.

[main interviewee]

A: **Finkelsztajn**. So he came here, it was a market day and someone came and killed him. You know, there were various personal accounts, this and that, I don't know. I was always trying to stay away from it.

Q: And what year were you in Łódź?

A: [19]46-7 and [19]47-8. After [19]78 I got my diploma. You know, it was school year.

Q: Uhmm.

A: Yes.

Q: And with this **Finkelsztajn**, what school year did it happen?

A: I think it was [19]47. Yes? Yes, it was sometimes during the carnival, I came here for few days and it was just then, it was a day or two days before I came.

Q: And those Jews who appeared here after the war, what were their relations with the government?

A: Good, because our friends came.

Q: I mean, what were their relations?

A: Rather good. How should I say it—

Q: Well, I don't know, how did it look like? Did you know that they had good relations?

[03:] 26:00:18 – [03:] 28:59:05
26:57 – 30:03

A: You know, They came out, they came out of hiding, they were victims, so it's obvious that they were taken under...under their care, right? Mr. Zbyszek, how should I say this? You don't agree with me?

[male voice]

A: No, I agree, it was such phenomenon—

[main interviewee]

A: Yes, it's a normal thing—

[male voice]

A: There was this selling. Someone was selling souvenirs of his entire family, even friends. Let's say, there was a house with a yard, right? So, if it was an uncle, a cousin, or anybody vaguely connected, they were selling it.

[main interviewee]

A: Aha, they were selling. Yes.

[male voice]

A: And even if sometimes this property did not belong to him or his family, they were organizing documents ill...let's say in various ways.

[main interviewee]

A: Well, yes. There were such things.

[male voice]

A: To this day the owners have these documents and based on them they own these houses.

Q: It means that people from Brańsk were buying at that time?

A: Yes, yes. *[unclear]* large number of houses at that time.

Q: And how, what kind, were these Jews, for example, when you were saying that during Soviet times, they were in militia, when Soviets were here in [19]39. And after the war?

[main interviewee]

A: It's hard for me to say.

Q: Did you know anybody from these 80 Jews apart from **Szapiros**?

A: You know, I didn't have much to do with them, because I, I was the only one in the pharmacy, which was supposed to be a specialized one, so I had so much work, that I couldn't occupy myself with other things. I was only, I was stuck at work, so, so I didn't have time for this.

Q: I understand. I don't have any more questions for you, but if Mr. Zbyszek would like to ask you something, please.

[male voice]

Q: I would only ask you for clarification. You use the word „our gendarmes.” Can you tell me what do you understand by these words “our gendarmes?”

[main interviewee]

A: Our gendar...these were such—aha, this was when I said—

Q: During the liquidation of the ghetto.

A: There was, there was **Cebulka**, (POLISH: onion) such nickname, it was **Cebulka, Majster** (POLISH: handyman)—

Q: And their nationality?

A: They were Germans.

Q: Germans.

A: They were Germans, but those who were gendarmes in Brańsk.

Q: From the beginning of the occupation.

A: Yes. There were few of them. There was **Majster, Cebulka, Przymiński [Pszyński]**—

Q: He wasn't Polish, he was a Volksdeutsche.

A: Volksdeutsche, but it was a Pole from Grudziądz.

[03:] 28:59:05 – [03:] 31:51:15

30:03 – 33:02

A: He was saying, he was telling me this. When he came to his mother for vacation, his mother saw him and she was tearing off his epaulets and she didn't want to acknowledge him as her son. So, he was a Pole from Grudziądz. And he went as a Volksdeutsche, I also had such propo...I mean, proposition. Few of them came to the pharmacy and were asking me for something. And somehow I managed with the language. And he asked me how come I speak German? **Sind Sie ein Deutscher** (GERMAN: Are you German?) I say that no, that I am Polish. And how do I know the language? From the secondary school. That's what I said. Although I didn't speak this language very well, because I was a mathematician and didn't like languages, which was by the way, bad, but in any case, I could somehow manage. When later, when I had to, I somehow managed.

Q: And can you tell me exactly who else was taking part in liquidation? Only local gendarmerie post? Or was there a special German unit?

A: A special, special unit came, because these three Gestapo men were there, and this, this, so they came specially for that.

Q: And besides Germans, were any other non-German units, which participated in the liquidation?

A: I don't know. This I don't know. I don't know who came, but the special unit came.

Q: And did Poles participate in the liquidation of the ghetto? Physically, meaning helping Germans?

A: I mean, there was this Falkowski, he was in militia, but he was a representative of an organization—

Q: Yes, but did he take part in the liquidation of the ghetto? For example, did you see him?

A: If—no, I didn't see. No, I didn't see.

[first interviewer]

Q: But he was in a blue police, yes?

A: In blue police, yes, but he was a representative of an organization.

[male voice]

Q: And did blue police take part in the deportation of these Jews?

A: Probably not. You know, I didn't see it personally, because one was rather avoiding it and—and besides—

[first interviewer]

Q: But if 240, if 240 horse wagons were standing, they must have been everywhere, after all it's a huge number of wagons.

A: Yes, but when, you know, when I am busy in the pharmacy and stay in the pharmacy all the time, when I don't go out, unfortunately I can't see. I only know about this 240 horse wagons from somewhere else, that most likely there was that many of them. Yes, 240?

[male voice]

A: Well, it's an estimate. About 200 horse wagons. Counting the number of people who could fit in one wagon, and that many were taken away, about 200.

A: Yes.

[first interviewer]

Q: So what Mr. Zbyszek?

[male voice]

A: That's all.

[first interviewer]

Q: Thank you very much. Thank you ma'am.

Conclusion of Interview

Final time-code stamp [03:] 31:50:05

Transcription and translation prepared by: Elizabeth Kosakowska

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