PIETRZAK, Marian
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
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In this interview, Marian Pietrzak describes the extermination of Jews in Sokołów Podlaski**.** He talks about the establishing of the ghetto and describes the daily life in the ghetto, dealing with hunger, educating children and establishing contacts with the Aryan side. He talks about the secret trading of goods and explains that Poles, such as his father, were providing information about the fate of other ghetto's at the request of the Sokołów merchants. He also describes a Jewish wedding he attended in the ghetto. He tells a story of a rich Jewish merchant named **Lewin**. Marian Pietrzak recalls that Jews from Sokołów were forced to build the extermination camp in Treblinka where they were consequently murdered. Marian talks about the roles of Germans, Ukrainians and the Polish blue police and the roles they played in the operation and liquidation of the ghetto. He describes how the Germans were trying to eradicate any evidence of the existence of Jewish life in Sokołów by populating formerly Jewish houses with Poles, conducting auctions of Jewish property and also removing Jewish gravestones from the local cemetery. Mr Pietrzak talks about the relationship between the Jews and Poles after the end of the war when the Jews were selling their former properties to the Poles. Marian displays Second World War artifacts: two passes issued to his parents by the German authorities, an invitation to a Jewish wedding and a 300 years old candlestick which he bought at an auction at the synagogue

File 1 of 2

[01:] 00:50:04- [01:] 34:29:18
00:23- 35:48

[01:] 00:50:04- [01:] 03:56:13
00:23- 03:56

Q: I would like to ask you to introduce yourself to the camera first and tell us where and when you were born.

A: My name is Marian Pietrzak, I live in Sokołów Podlaski,and I was born on the 29th of August, 1932 in Siedlce. My parents relocated from Siedlce to Sokołów in [19]38 and then we started our life in Sokołów. My parents moved literally two or three weeks before the outbreak of the war, that means we changed the apartments and moved from the Polish district to the, so called, Jewish district. Of course we only lived on the outskirts of the Jewish district. Later when the Germans entered and the war had started the part of the district, the street where we lived, was annexed to the ghetto. And all the

Poles who lived in the ghetto and who were over 16 years of age received German passes, which were written in German. The passes said: “The Pole shown in this photograph is allowed to enter the ghetto because he lives on the ghetto territory.” Of course passes like that weren’t issued immediately. They were issued in [19]41 when the Germans simply wanted to gather the Jews tightly in one place. The Jews weren’t allowed to walk around the entire town any more, unlike before the war, and they were given special arm bands. The armbands were white and they were embroidered with a six pointed blue star. It was a so called star of Zion. And they were wearing a star like that. The Germans—the Jews were allowed to walk around the Polish districts, whereas we...

Q: That means that the ghetto was closed?

A: It wasn’t closed yet, but the Jews weren’t allowed to enter Polish districts without the arm bands. When the Germans became more rigorous and forbade the Jews to enter Polish districts, and then they issued passes for the Poles. My mom got a pass with her photograph and so did my dad. I didn’t get one because I was too young. I wasn’t 16. Since we lived in the ghetto I was walking around the entire ghetto territory, of course [only] where I needed to go.

Q: And you weren’t afraid to walk without a pass?

A: No, I wasn’t. Because there were a few Polish families living in the ghetto at that time, a few dozen Polish families, one can say. And they also had passes, which means the grownups did, because boys like me didn’t have any. And Jewish boys played with me and we also played with them. Now...there...

[01] 03:42:23- [01:] 06:05:02
03:44- 6:13

Q: Did Jewish boys have to wear arm bands when they were in their own Jewish district?

A: No they didn’t, only when they were going into a Polish district. It was the time when the Jewish police was established. The Jewish Police had round hats *[he imitates wearing a hat]* which were similar to the hats of firefighters or doormen nowadays. They had yellow armbands, it wasn’t a white band with a star, but a yellow one, as far as I remember, and they had wooden sticks at their sides. And barriers [checkpoints] were created after the ghetto was established. That means the ghetto was getting tighter. There was a greater terror, rigor. Each barrier was watched by the policemen so that—the barriers were set on the main streets. There were two barriers in the ghetto in Sokołów. One barrier was set on Winnice Street and the other one on the present day Wilczyńskiego Street, formerly **Rogowska** [Street]. That’s where the second barrier was,

because the ghetto was split into, as if, two parts—it was split by the main street, the so called Długa Street. I lived on the southern end in the larger ghetto; there were more Jewish people there. The ghetto included the following Streets: Winnice, Szeroka, Nowa, Niecała, Kuśnierska, Olszewskiego i Próżna and a part of Długa Street, on the side of—where it belonged to—to that part of the ghetto. And the Germans ordered a wall built where the streets met—where a street met—Jewish streets met—that means where the ghetto streets met Długa Street. There was a wall by the entrance to the streets. The wall was about three meters high and it was topped with glass, so that no one could pass through.

Q: A brick wall?

A: Yes a brick wall made of bricks, which was about three meters tall. With sharp glass on top of it, so that no one could pass through the wall. The sides of the streets—that is these—that is on the other side of the street by the houses and by the gardens the ghetto was fenced by a tall fence and barbed wire. The fence was about 2.30 [meters] tall. It was a wooden fence. The posts were wooden and thick barbed wire was [strung] in between.

[01:] 06:05:02- [01:] 11:36:19
06:13- 12:01

A: But before it was fenced off we were living and walking around the entire ghetto. And I walked to Jewish stores to make small purchases. I saw how a Jewish school looked like because one day I went to buy... My mother sent me to buy some det [unfinished: detergent]—some blue dye for dying underwear during the wash *[the dye was typically used to distinguish ones laundry from other people's]*. And I we [unfinished: went]—went to a house where the store was. At the time, a Jewish school was located in that place, but legal Jewish schools already —the Jews weren't allowed to study at all any more since the beginning of the occupation. That means, they had their own school which was organized on the territory of the Jewish district, I mean in the ghetto. And I just went to buy that dye and I looked and there they sat, behind two tables sat about ten to twelve Jewish students and…And I was surprised that they were learning Polish. Back then, when I was going to school I was going probably to third grade and I was surprised—I was listening for a while to the lesson and… Because I didn't walk into the store, because there were two doors that looked alike. Instead of walking into that door, I walked into another one. Instead of to the store I walked to school and I was surprised that they were learning Polish. And I remember that they were studying when to write "rz" and when to write "ż" *[proper use of "rz" and "ż" is a spelling challenge in the Polish language]*. I remember these words and the teacher who was with these students was explaining to them when you write "rz" and when you write "ż". And that puzzled me, because it was

already known—because there were rumors that Jews would be murdered by the Germans. And I thought to myself, "Why are they studying, these students? If I were them I would prefer to run, hang out, stay with the boys, and they were all sitting behind the tables and studying. It was probably towards the end of [19]41, or at the beginning of [19]42.

Q: That means winter?

A: No, it wasn't winter. There was no snow, so it could have been…We lived in the ghetto till May, till the beginning of May [19]42. That is, we were relocated around the fifth or the sixth of May [19]42 from the ghetto. And the ghetto liquidation took place in September, that is, the Jews were taken to Treblinka, so it was a few months… We were, we lived [there] very long, until May [19]42.

Q: What street did you live on?

A: On Winnice Street**,** on Winnice Street**.** It was exactly at the beginning of May when we were relocated to the street called Bóżniczna, presently it is called Magistracka Street. Why was it called Bożnica—Bóżniczna? Because a Jewish temple was there, [it was] so called "bożnica" (prayer house*)*—a synagogue. It was a big, large temple. And from that name the street was called Bóżnicza. Only the synagogue was closer to the center of the city, and we lived in the suburbs. We lived literally 50 meters from the gate. So when the ghetto...

Q: Were all the Polish families removed from the ghetto?

A: All of the Polish families, yes. And before that, when we still lived in the ghetto, we stayed with a landlord who had probably three cows and he also kept pigs. And so did we, because we were on the outskirts of the ghetto. It [the area] was incorporated into the ghetto. We also had pigs, and I was going.... And there was no—because we had no potatoes. Potatoes were expensive and I used to go into the ghetto to buy potato peels from the Jewish population. I walked inside their houses, I had a basket or two baskets, and I was making purchases for 30 groszy (Polish currency, equivalent of pennies), for 50 groszy. It all depended on how many peels there were. A full basket cost 80 groszy or one złoty (złoty –Polish currency; 100 groszy equals one złoty). And because of that I could go and see how these people—that is very modestly, very poorly, because the Jews weren't allowed to leave the ghetto. They weren't allowed to work, so what were they supposed to live on? So these richer ones were selling [their] more expensive clothing, they were selling shoes—of course to the Poles. That is to those who were secretly entering the ghetto. And the exchange looked like this: the Poles would bring food to the

Jews, and they [the Jews] took shoes, and fabric. Those who had stores had also various merchandise from the stores; they were general merchandise or grocery stores. So these richer ones... somehow—they simply managed. The poor ones didn't have any means to live. So at night, when it got dark, dozens of Jews were surreptitiously leaving the ghetto, [to go] out of the city. They went to the nearby villages and there they were simply begging for alms. These… There were also shoemakers and tailors there. The shoemakers were taking shoes from the people and bringing them to the ghetto. They repaired them and then the next night or in two nights, they would again leave the ghetto. One took the shoes to the ghetto and brought back potatoes and flour or something else. And that lasted for a while. One day the Germans realized that there was a secret trading going on between the Jews and the Poles. The gendarmes set an ambush by the pass, where the Jews were passing and they shot one Jew. A gendarme… He had on *[he demonstrates]*, he carried a sack with potatoes. A gendarme____ It was literally 30, 40 meters away from my house.

[01:] 11:36:19- [01:] 12:43:04
12:01- 13:07

Q: But how do you know that they shot him?

A: Because I saw him, because it was 30, 40 meters away from my house. People congregated immediately. And there was...

Q: But did it happen during the day?

A: Towards the morning. It was only at daybreak, dawn. Dawn had started. He was coming back from the village and he had on *[it is also an incorrect phrase in Polish]*, on his back, a small sack with potatoes. It wasn't a sack, it was a small bag. There was perhaps 10 kilograms in all—of potatoes, flour and all. He took the shoes, he was a shoemaker and he was coming back—repaired shoes, and he was coming back with food. And there was a gendarme named **Proppe [Prope].** He hid with his rifle and he yelled, "**Halt!**" [German: stop]. The Jew didn't stop so he fired and killed him and then he walked towards the sack. He kicked the bag—people who saw that told me about it because I walked there later. I didn't go there right away. Only after that murdered Jew laid there for a couple of hours, and I saw him there—he [**Proppe**] kicked the bag and the potatoes rolled out and he said, "**Verfluchte Jude**" (German: damn Jew) and he walked away as if nothing happened. He walked away.

Q: And how did you know that he was a shoemaker? Did you know the Jew?

[01:] 12:43:04- [01:] 16:13:23

13:07- 16:43

A: The shoemaker! – Everyone knew him. My father knew him and my mother did. All the neighbors did. They knew, they were saying his last name. I don't remember his name because I wasn't interested at the time. They all said that he was a shoemaker. He was taking shoes to the village and in the evening he was coming back with the pot [unfinished: potatoes]. Dozens of Jews were going like that, dozens. The merchants were taking, taking merchandise that was left – you know – the ones who had shops. And it wasn't allowed, how do you say it, for Poles to come to the ghetto to make purchases. So they were bringing the merchandise, they were taking the food and it was going on, one could say, almost till the day—the liquidation of the ghetto.

Q: And when you lived in the ghetto, and when the Poles were allowed to—were allowed to go in and out of the ghetto, weren't the Jews asking them to buy something for them or...

A: What do you mean they didn't?! Once it was like that: my mother... We lived in the ghetto but we had to buy potatoes and because the farmer (Polish word "gospodarz" can mean "farmer" or "landlord"*)* whom we lived with had no potatoes to sell we had to buy them from somebody else. So my mother bought about for sacks of potatoes, that is, about 400 kilograms. Back then it was called a "korzec" (this is an old fashioned weight measure) – four bushels. And the farmer was driving my mother on the cart home. He was bringing in the potatoes but he had to cross the gate where a Jewish policeman was. The barrier was closed and my mother said to the Jewish policeman: "Raise the barrier." And he looked at the potatoes in these bags and he said in such a scary voice— that policeman—"You are taking potatoes to the ghetto for the Jews." And my mother said, "I live in the ghetto", she said, "and I am bringing potatoes for myself."—"You are taking them for the Jews." And then my mother said this, "And even if I was taking them for the Jews then what? You are also a Jew. Why shouldn't I bring potatoes for the Jews?!" And the policeman got disconcerted and... And then my mother [said], "Are you opening or not?! Or else I will raise the barrier myself!" And this policeman, like it or not, opened it and my mother got in. And we brought it [the potatoes], and you know, when we needed to sell a bag of potatoes to someone, then we did. Of course we sold it for money, because they had, they had money... They were also getting onions, I remember, they were bringing them from Szczeglacin. And when they didn't deliver them into the ghetto, they would get them near the ghetto and they would then take it [from there]. Once, even my mother bought such a bag, it had 25 kilograms of onions. And the trading and life were going on together. But later when... with time, during the year [19]42, when we were already relocated from the ghetto, then the ghetto got to be, simply, more isolated from the Poles. And no one was allowed to—before, the Poles, who lived on the ghetto territory, were allowed to come in. Later, nobody was allowed to come in. But when we were still allowed to enter the ghetto my father had quite good relations with the Jewish

population. Because my father was renting a building from a Jew and he had his blacksmith shop there. So it was a Jewish building and a Jew rented it out to my father. And my parents and the ghetto Jews had such good relations that one day my dad got an invitation to a Jewish wedding. He did many things for them...

[01:] 16:13:23- [01:] 19:25:06
16:43- 20:06
[He shows]

A: Let me show: here are the passes to—here are my father's and my mother's passes to the ghetto. They were issued in [19]41 *[camera shows a close up]*. *Ready?* And here is the invitation to a Jewish wedding. My father received an invitation to a Jewish wedding *[he shows the invitation]*.

Q: And did you go to the wedding?

A: Perhaps I will read what is written on the invitation: "The wedding ceremony of Miss Gucia Lubelska and Mr. Wólf Rozenbaume will commence on Sunday, March 23, 1941 at 6 o'clock in the afternoon in Sokołów, in the home of Mr. Rozenbaum, which is located at... Here it is written Pierackiego, but that was a mistake, because the wedding was moved to a different house on **Rogowska** Street, presently Wilczyńskiego. Underneath was a signature: parents and the betrothed, the signature on the invitation. And my father got that invitation and he said to my mother: "We will go to the wedding." Well, my mother was a little afraid. She said, "You know, we are going to go to the wedding. It's true we live in the ghetto but when we go... You never know what is going to happen at such wedding. Perhaps the Germans will come, or else?" But the wedding went well. And my father said, "I will take", he said, "Maniuś", that is me. They were calling me Maniuś (it is diminutive for Marian; it is a boy's name in Polish) because I was nine. And my mother said: "What for, why will you take a child?", and my father said: "Let him go, because he would never see a wedding like that again." So I went. I was at the wedding, and it took place in a two storey building. The entire str [unfinished: street]—the entire house was used for the wedding ceremony. We were on the first, I remember, and on the second floor. I remember celebrating in—such a big, beautiful armchair. The bride, which was Miss Gucia Lubelska in a white gown, was sitting in it. And at one point somebody—well, they were saying all sorts of words in Jewish *[likely: Yiddish]*, just like you would at this sort of celebration. Then at one point, somebody came up to her and gave her a glass. Gucia rose with the glass in her hand *[he imitates]* and she tossed it up. The glass fell to the ground and everybody was happy, because the glass shattered and that meant that there would be happiness. The glass fell to the floor, it broke, they started to dance and clap their hands and the ceremony went on. This is what I remember, this interesting story. And I also got some candy at the reception, I can't say

[I can't say that wasn't nice]. My father came and he gave them to me and he said: "Here, have some candies", he said, "from the newlyweds" he said, "they are for you."

[01:] 19:25:06- [01:] 22:19:07
20:06- 29:31

Q: And who were the newlyweds? How did your father know them?

A: They were relatives of... of **Lejzor [Leizer] Siedlecki** who was renting the smith shop, the forge to my father. Because it was the smith shop... And they were his relatives. And what else...? Because we were on good terms, one day when we had already moved out from the ghetto... I am sorry... yes, when we moved out of the ghetto two ghetto inhabitants came to my father's shop. One of them was called **Przepiórka [Przepiórko, Przepiurka]**, and the other was called **Skowroński**. **Skowroński** was a very rich Jewish merchant, and entrepreneur, who came from Kalisz. There he had his factory and a mill and something else, some other enterprise. They came to my father and they said with such words—they started to talk about things but my father sensed that they came on business. And my father's forge was literally about 30 meters away from the ghetto barrier. We lived one block farther – 40, perhaps 50 meters away. And he said: "You came here for a reason. Tell me what it is about." And they say: "We and the Jews from Sokołów", he said, "trust you and we would want you to go to the town of Sobibór to check if there is a camp where they murder Jews." And he said on such and such day, if I am not mistaken, it was probably June 6 [19]42 a train left from Chełm to Sobibór and nobody returned. He gave the train number, he and ... **Skowroński** together with... with... **Skowroński** and **Przepiórka** gave the train number and the name of the train engineer, who was driving that train with the Je [unfinished: Jews]—with the Jewish folks to...to… to...Sobibór. And he said this: "We are going to pay you for that", and he asked: "How much are you making in a day?"– **Przepiórka** and **Skowroński**. And my father said: "I am making 100 złoty a day." "100 złoty is a lot", said this, this **Przepiórka**—Then he ***[Skowroński]*** said: "We will give you 100 złoty a day for your per diem and we will give you a certain address in Chełmno. Go and find out what happened to the transport of Jews which had left Chełmno." And they gave my father the address and the street....**Siedlecka** [Street] number 9. "You go to Chełmno", he said," our Jews are there—the Jews we made an arrangement with, and they will give you all the possible information and some help, as much as they can afford." Of course we knew what kind of help you could expect from the ghetto. "And we will pay you." This **Przepiórka** wanted to haggle a little with my father about the price, that he needs to pay as much as my father makes in the smith shop, but **Skowroński** said: "We will pay, don't say anything. Who knows if we could find anybody who would be willing to go", he said, "and run an errand for us like this gentleman." My father didn't take the money yet. They gave my father two bottles of wine; this **Przepiórka** brought it since he owned a big grocery store before

the war. He said, “Please take it for the road and go.” My father went to Chełmno and he said: “We have to arrange it somehow”, he said, “find a few things out and get someone to talk.” But at that time it was risky to ask people, because there were various **Volksdeutscher** (German: a person who chose to become a German citizens based on their lineage; during the Second World War many Poles decided to change their citizenship for profit and security) and German spies. So he went to a restaurant, sat down and started to chat with a man next to him *[a rooster crows in the background]*, who was sitting at the next table. Finally some other man also walked up and sat down next to my father. And while they were drinking an orange soda he bragged that his brother was a **Volksdeutscher**. My father said: “I thought to myself, there will be no more talking and I went to”, he said, “to **Siedlecka** Street number 9. It was the ghetto and I entered the ghetto.” You could enter it somehow from the side where my father did, because it wasn’t fenced off. And what else? Not all the Jews were deported from the ghetto back then. Germans took, as we would call it, a quota – the first transport of Jews. And he went to Siedlecka Street number 9 and he knocked on the door. The people initially didn’t want to answer the door for my father; it was an apartment building. I described it all in my book. And my father said: “Don’t be afraid. I am Polish.” And then this woman opened the door and my father walked in. “Before she opened the door”, he said, “I heard a noise in there and I peeped in”, he said, “through the keyhole. I saw the ottoman open and then the woman’s daughter jumped inside the ottoman; the daughter of the woman who opened the door. She shut her in that ottoman. My father entered and during the conversation [the woman] said that she closed her daughter in because she was afraid: “Maybe these are the Germans or someone who collaborates with the Germans?” *[A rooster crows in the background]* And my father explained the whole deal that he came to see what happened to the transport of Jews who were taken away, and she said: “Sir”, she said, “people say that there is a special machine in Sobibór which grinds up Jews and then sends [the remains] through the canal to the Bug River. Whoever arrives at Sobibór doesn’t come back.” He said that this woman was extremely frightened. She let her daughter out from the ottoman. And the daughter also couldn’t supply much—any information to my father. So my father left the house and walked away. He said:” I simply somehow wasn’t afraid. I went”, he said, “farther towards the center of the ghetto. I met”, he said, “a man with a green armband. He was a handsome, elegant man and he was a member of the Judenrat (German: the Jewish Council), that is a member of the Jewish Council, **Rada Żydowska**. And my father said: “I came from Sokołów Podlaski to hear what had happened with such and such transport. I was sent by such and such [man].” He then showed what was written in Jewish (likely Yiddish) to the Judenrat member. He looked at that and shook his head, and said: “The Germans took today”, he said, “a transport of Jews to the camp”, he said, “in Sobibór”. And he said: “Run away from here, from Chełm, from this district quickly. Go quickly home and tell **Przepiórka** and **Skowroński**, that the camp—that Sobibór is a death camp.” But my father didn’t

want to give up yet. He went to the train station and he was looking for the rail man, whose name he had written. **Przepiórka** gave his name to my father. His name was **Łapaciński**. He [my father] found the rail man and said: "I will go to Sobibór with you. I will go with you to the camp when you are going to drive there with the transport of Jews and you will check—I will check whether Sobibór is truly a death camp. And then he said: "I can lend you a rail uniform", he said, "but if they check your identification and you won't have an ID, you will never return."And the rail man said to my father: "This is a death camp", he said, "all the Jews", he said, "are murdered and killed there." And my father said that he gave up the and he didn't go to the death camp to find out—to simply learn—to let **Przepiórka** and **Skowroński** know when he came back from Sokołów that he was in Chełm—he wanted the Jews to write him a note, but the Jews didn't want to write him any note. So he said: "I bought two bottles of orange soda and I peeled off the labels. The label said lemonade, orange soda factory in Chełm. "And I took it as a proof that I was in Chełm ", he said, "I took these two orange soda labels", he said, "I had no other proof." And since then local Jews started to place their families in the country. That means, you know—with people. They looked for—they looked for hideouts. The richer ones started to—mainly the rich placed their families in the nearby country with farmers, who were building underground shelters, bunkers. And this is why a few dozen people survived. After the war about 50 people returned to Sokołów, but the majority perished. And this is how it went—when the Germans discovered that Poles were sheltering Jews, the entire Jewish and Polish family was killed and buried in one ditch. Right there on the spot, in the backyard or next to the backyard. They were shot, they *[it is unclear who was asked to dig a ditch]* were ordered to dig a ditch and they were buried in that ditch.

[01:] 22:19:07- [01]:32:09:03
29:31- 33:22

Q: And you saw these—these scenes?

A: I didn't see them but I talked to others about what was happening. I knew them. It was three kilometers from Sokołów on a colony near Łuzki. Here is even— there was a lady whose family—her family was killed. The whole Jewish family was killed and... That means the Polish family was killed together *[presumably with the Jews]* and buried in one grave.

Q: And besides the Jew whom you saw shot when he was going—the shoemaker with potatoes—did you see any other scenes when they *[presumably Germans]* were killing somebody?

A: Well, I saw the death of **Przepiórka.** It happened after the deportation. He didn't go to Treblinka to the gas, but instead he hid in a shelter, somewhere in the attic. Are you

filming all the time?... or in the attic...And the Jews were deported – let's say today – and for two weeks Germans and Ukrainians were walking around the backyards and the basements and they were looking for the Jews who were hiding. And this is what I didn't like – b Jewish police. You know that when the Jews were taken to Treblinka we lived in our old house next to the barrier and we—we pulled the curtains shut in the windows and we left only narrow slits and we were watching what was going on in the ghetto. I even went to the attic and I looked through the window there. I saw when they were lining the Jews up on Szeroka Street. They chased everyone out and they tied the hands of the younger Jews. It was literally about 70 meters away from me. I could see it from the window, right? They were tying their hands together and [tying] them up—one—that means all—the four of them were standing and they were tied one to another, one to another and the four of them were one unit. And the Jewish police were helping with that. These were worthless people these Jewish police. They collaborated with the Germans and acted the same as the Germans. And then when all the Jews were killed and taken to Treblinka [only] the Jewish police stayed and they were walking together with the Germans and searching for the hidden Jews. They were rascals. And one kind—one day I was going on my bike, because it was on a boulevard and the boulevard was literally coming up to the ghetto itself. It bordered the ghetto. I was riding on my bike. I had a bike and I was learning to ride it well. Suddenly there was a man is running from behind the barrier – there was a regular barrier – a man was running. He was wearing a white shirt with short sleeves. This shirt was similar to me *[he meant: mine]* only—it was also striped but the stripes were smaller. His head wasn't covered and he was running very fast to the bridge. There was a river named Cetynia—he wanted to jump past that bridge and continue running, but the gendarme ran out of the ghetto with a rifle. He held the rifle in his hand and he yelled: "**Halt, halt, halt!**"[German: stop]. And he caught up with that Jew when he [the Jew] was jumping—he skipped past the bridge and wanted to use a short cut. The bridge was, let's say here, and he—and here was the river and he was running from the ghetto and he wanted to jump there and then run to the Jewish cemetery. And the German caught him, grabbed him. And this—the Jew yanked from his pocked—he [had] two [pockets] and he pulled out two rolls of money. These were large sums, for this money you could buy ...well a lesser house or a land parcel. And he gave it to that German so that he wouldn't kill him. The German took that money and hid it in his pocket and he said: "**Raus**" [German: get, go, out], to the ghetto. And he only managed to cross the barrier, the German was standing with his rifle, he aimed, *[he imitates]* fired and killed him. And that was **Przepiórka**, who came with **Skowroński** to my father to check if Sobibór was a death camp.

[01]:32:09:03-[01:] 34:29:18
33:22- 35:48
Q: And how do you know that it was **Przepiórka**?

A: Because my mother and my father knew him.

Q: And you—did you know him?

A: Of course I—I, I saw him and I said: "Who was killed?" And my mother and my father said: "This is **Przepiórka**", he said, "who once came to your father. This is", he said, "**Przepiórka**". Because we literally lived from this—the barrier was here and I was biking here and he was standing here *[he points with his finger on his lap]*. And my mother and father also saw that incident. Only they saw it—they didn't go outside; and I was outside. I was standing there casually. I was from the ghetto—I was about 15 meters from the Jew, from the ghetto, and from the barrier. I saw it from up close.

Q: And afterwards...was the search going on for a while?

A: After the Jews were deported to Treblinka it lasted for about two weeks—about. It is hard to say exactly, but it was about two weeks. They were dragging them out from the basements and from the attics. Once I saw two Jewish girls—when the Poles were allowed to move into the ghetto there were two young Jewish girls there as well. And the Poles told them to run away, but—these were two young sisters—and they were so scared that they didn't even want to run away. They didn't know where to go and the Poles... And after the Jews were murdered, Germans put up huge posters downtown: "Workshops, shops, locales [available] after Jewish population at the disposal of Poles", so that the Poles would move in, so that the streets simply... to populate the houses so that no one would be able to tell that any Jews were ever there. And it was because—because they wanted [to have] no sign that the Jews were ever there—to fill up the streets and houses. Well, and the Poles who had time and who had apartments *[the meaning of this statement is unclear]* moved into the Jewish houses. And out of curiosity I went to see how the ghetto looked like. I decided—I went to my old district, where we used to live and I was walking into various apartments. I looked and I found, I remember, a pen. I found books, from which I later studied. "Windows", the book was entitled: "Windows to the World", for sixth grade. And later, three years later I had that book in my book bag; it was my textbook for Polish. It was still signed: **Martepa Cukier**. Martepa Cukier. The book still had the signature of the Jewish girl, yes.

[01:] 34:29:18
35:48

File 2 of 2

[02:] 00:46:13- [02:] 35:47:12
00:40- 37:08

[02:] 00:46:13- [02:] 04:01:02
00:40- 04:02

Q: During these two weeks when—after the Jews had been deported—please tell us what else you saw during these two weeks? What was happening in the ghetto then?

A: As I mentioned the Jews who were still running away from the ghetto, tried to hide in the basements and the attics. One day I saw a gendarme escorting two Jewish boys. There was a Jewish cemetery opposite from where we lived. He took [them] to that Jewish cemetery – one was about ten and another one was eight. He shot them both with his pistol, both of these Jewish boys. I also saw when they were binging—that is I didn't see it, but I only heard the shots nearby, because—on this Jewish cemetery. Because on one side of the street was—there was a street and we lived over here, and a Jewish cemetery was on the other side of the street—these were the outskirts of the Jewish cemetery. And—it was old and closed—so they often brought the Jews there and shot them. And we listened how many shots [there were], how many times—we were afraid to look out the window so when the Germans left we would walk over and we look—there were one or two Jews killed there. So they were taking them from the ghetto and killing them there and later the carts would arrive and take them [the bodies] to the other cemetery. It was here, open till the ghetto was liquidated and that is where they were taking the Jews who were shot. There were many similar incidents. And later people would recognize them and say: here was this one killed, here was that one, there was that one... But such episodes happened frequently. And initially—because very many Jews hid after the deportations –so they were taking them in front of the synagogue and they were shooting them in from of the synagogue and then they were laid on the other side of the street—they were laid in rows over there in the backyard, on the so called—in the backyard of a prayer house. There was a Jewish prayer house and [they] were laid in rows and columns in that backyard. And people... and I personally didn't go there but there were some who went to see the Jews from the side of the gardens. Because farther down was a garden and right behind it was a Jewish square and the prayer house, and there they were killing them. So they were coming from the garden side to watch them. They said that there. And later on that spot—next to that spot they dug three or four huge ditches. And 25-30 people were put in and buried in each ditch and then covered with soil. And when the Germans started to lose the war in the spring of [19]44 two German cars arrived. [They looked] like coolers and they were covered from all sides with metal. All the Jews were taken out from the ditches and they were put into these coolers and then taken, most likely, to Treblinka. But they didn't find one of the ditches because the ditches—after the

Jews were buried, the ditches were well camouflaged. They didn't find one ditch, which means that they didn't know exactly how many there were. And after the war, when a warehouse was built, one of the ditches was discovered in that location—the mass grave. And a whole truck full of bones was removed, that means that the Germans didn't find one ditch. And the bones were taken to the Jewish cemetery and then buried.

[02:] 04:01:02- [02:] 06:07:11
04:02- 06:12

Q: And who was searching the ghetto to find Jews?

A: Germans and Ukrainians! Ukrainians were no better than Germans, they were even worse. Dru [unfinished: drunk]—they were drunk. They kept drinking and killing the Jews. They were partying and they were robbing. They took the gold, you know, and they were selling it to speculators; the gold. And—and I saw—there was no chance that a German or a Ukrainian pardoned the life of any Jew caught. Because also the Polish police—the Polish police also participated when they were surrounding the ghetto and taking the Jews to Treblinka. But the police didn't go inside; instead they watched the outside. They watched so that nobody would escape. They walked together: a German gendarme, a Ukrainian and a blue policeman, so that there would be no bribery. And the three of them walked together. But the Poles, the blue police didn't enter the ghetto, because the Germans didn't trust the Poles. Only the Ukrainians entered and killed; and the Germans, and the gendarmes.

Q And did the evacuation last long?

A: You know, the Germans entered the ghetto, and the ghetto was surrounded. My father got up early, because he was getting up in the morning, at four in the morning, for work, before dawn. It even wasn't—even—it was dark and by electric light—because he had electric light in the workshop then, and he would light a lamp and the workshop—the forge and there was fire. It was bright [inside] from the fire and from the hearth... So the ghetto was already surrounded and he was standing by the barrier. Nearby, not far from the barrier, only—about 30 meters from the barrier was a German, a Ukrainian and there was a machine gun set. It was set up on a tripod. Some sort of RKM or LKM (the proper name is RKM, it is a light machine gun, "ręczny karabin maszynowy"), set up on a tripod. And there was a German and still farther down was a blue policeman. But the Poles didn't enter the ghetto. Only the Ukrainians and the Germans did. You know, it also happened that Ukrainians were killing with their rifle butts. This is a worthless nation, these Ukrainians, they killed.

Q: But how, how do you know that they were killing with rifle butts?

A: There were those who saw it. I personally didn't see, but when... When five people said that they witnessed it then had to be so. Because if only one said it then he could lie, but when this one saw it and that one saw it, and these were people, how do you say it, both young and old and children—well, then you had to believe.

Q: So the Poles from Sokołów also witnessed all that?

A: They saw it, they did. And when I saw things I told about them. Now...

[02:] 06:07:11- [02:] 10:22:10
06:12- 10:39

Q: And I wanted to ask you one more time about the barriers: when the barriers were in place they were guarded by the Jewish Police—was anybody else watching the barriers as well?

A: As long as the ghetto existed only the Jews were watching them and then the ghetto was prepared for liquidation by a German named **Hermann [Herman]**, The Jews called him a doctor. They said: "Here comes doctor **Hermann.** Here comes doctor **Hermann**". And he was preparing the ghetto for liquidation, that means he simply said where to put the barriers, where to—how to fence off the ghetto, where are—where the checkpoints should be so that the Jews wouldn't leave. And **Hermann** was preparing the ghetto for liquidation. And even before the liquidation—the Jews had their so called Jewish Council; that was the name for the Judenrat; that means that there was a ghetto mayor. And when the Jews were deported to Treblinka the Jewish Council stayed behind. And then the council was deported together with the Jewish policeman—maybe in two or maybe in three weeks they were taken to Treblinka. The police and the Jewish Council were arrested, the policemen were gathered and grouped by fours, and then taken to the train station. They were loaded on the trains and taken to Treblinka. But **Lewin**, the Jewish mayor, Judenrat president was left behind. And that president—before the Germans had promised him that they would spare his life and his family's life, and the Jewish Council's life and the policemen's life—so the policemen took their families to the estate Grodzisk , which was 12 kilometers from Sokołów. **Lewin** also took his family, this president of the Jewish Council, of this Judenrat. But after the Jews were deported to Treblinka and when these Jews—the Judenrat and the police didn't know anything when the Germans went to Grodzisk**.** They took all the Jews to Sokołów and they shot them. Part of those Jews was killed on the way because they were running away, but the president stayed till the very end. The president organized a party for the Germans in his house. Perhaps they already knew that all had been killed and everything—that all Jew went to the death camp but no one knows... He threw a banquet for the Germans. And

there was also an episode when they ran out of vodka and **Lewin** said this to the gendarmes: “Let me go and I will go to the Polish restaurant.” The restaurant—the restaurant was run by **Klem [Klemm]**. He was Polish, of course, but he had a German name, but he was Polish, **Klem**. And he said: “I will get good vodka.” Because he had a lot of money and he was a very rich merchant this **Lewin** so he went to that restaurant through the Polish district and my friend Jan **Raczko** ran across him there and he said: “**Lewin**, where are you going?”–And he [**Lewin**] said: “I am going”, he said, “I have guests, the gendarmes, and I am going to **Klem’s to** buy vodka so that we can finish our feast.” And he [**Klem**] said: “The Germans let you out”, he said, “and you had better run away”, he said, “because they are going to kill you”. He said, “Do you know that your family was murdered in Grodzisko?” But he didn’t answer—and he [**Raczko** said]: “Don’t buy any vodka at all. You are free now so run away somewhere!”—he said. And he just shrugged his arms and walked away to get that vodka. He came back—he came back with that vodka, they finished the feast and one German took the Jew, that **Lewin**, out to the Jewish district. There he said: “**Lewin**, since you are a Jewish king”—he called him a king—“you won’t go to Treblinka to the gas”, he said, “but you we will die the honorable death.” He took out a pistol and he shot him with his pistol.

[02:] 10:22:10- [02:] 12:49:20
10:39- 13:13

Q: And how do you know. Did anyone see that?

A: This was told by the Poles, the Poles who.... You know, it wasn’t after all in a closed building only he took him outside. And the Poles were also serving during that feast. Somebody was there at that feast. The Germans took somebody to, simply—to serve during the feast. Because it happened in **Lewin**’s house—and the houses—the Poles had moved into these houses. The Germans had kept only that one, only **Lewin**. They wanted to get his gold, the gold.

Q: And before the Jews were taken to Treblinka—had they heard anything about Treblinka?

A: They did! The Jews from Sokołów after all had built the camp in Treblinka. But think—what other option did they have? They were all here like pigs in a poke *[he meant to say trapped]*. There was no other way out. Here was—on one side there were the Germans in the east; they were 1000 meters past the border so there was no point running away to Russia. On the other side was the Reich and over here was the General Government. What were they supposed to do? So they were building the camp in Treblinka in 19[41]. A German—Germans, the Sokołów elder set a quota. They went to the Jewish Council and they said that they wanted that and that many young people delivered for constructing the buildings in Treblinka. The Judenrat president provided the young

people; they put them on the train and took them to Treblinka. And they built the camp in Treblinka and then they were released. They built it and were released. Only later the camp started to... Only later the Germans and the Ukrainians came and built the gas chambers... they could have been previously built by the Jews but they didn't know what it would be, these gas chambers—what it was—what these rooms were. Only the Germans and the Ukrainians set everything else up, which is the place for gas *[noise in the background, a door is creaking]*.

Q: But they didn't know what they were building.

A: They didn't know what they were building, they didn't. They—the camp was built. Even our friend who lived next to our—he was our neighbor. His name was **Szlame Ciepelewicz.** He was building that camp. And the other camp was built in Szczeglacin. **Szlame** was also building that camp. He was—he was a boy of about 17, 18 years. And he was there and he was building it all and then he was telling everything about it.

Q: But did he know what he was building?

[02:] 12:49:20- [02:] 14:48:22
13:13- 15:17

A: No, they didn't know what they were building. They only knew that it would be some sort of—some sort of camp. But they didn't know that it was a death camp.

Q: And they didn't know until the very end?

A: You know, they knew already when they were going to Treblinka. The Jews were escaping from the trains; they were jumping out of trains. The Germans stood on b**rennkarts,** do you know what the **brennkarts** are? These are the spots by the rail cars, where a rail man or a guard can stand. They stood there with their rifles, with their machine guns and when the Jews were jumping out they were shooting—they killed many Jews. They tore out the boards—and all the cars were locked with dead bolts, and they were locked with padlocks, and the windows were barred with barbed wire. I saw such transports personally; not the ones from Sokołów but from other transports which were passing through Sokołów—and I was watching these transports pass. And back then, you know, you watched secretly, you watched from far away. Because you were not allowed—when the Jewish transport was at the station the passenger trains wouldn't stop. They might have stopped somewhere earlier, they would let them know. When the Jewish transport would leave from the station in Sokołów then the regular passenger train would arrive.

Q: So when you saw these trains...

A: Yes.

Q: Did you see any situations, somebody—were they shooting at anybody, and did anybody run away?

A: I didn't see any situations I only heard—from the rail men, what the rail men said... Because the rail employees were allowed to be there, to see. They were servicing the tracks and the Germans didn't say anything to them. We frequently went to.....to go fishing in Treblinka. Train tickets were cheap during the occupation. Tickets cost 2.20 – two złoty and 20 groszy, and a kilogram of pork fat cost 150 złoty, so the tickets had the pre-war prices. My father was an amateur angler and we were going to Treblinka. The train station was about three kilometers behind the camp *[noise, pause]*.

[02:] 14:48:22- [02:] 18:50:14
15:17- 19:29

A: Say when...

Q: Ok, fine.

A: And we were going fishing—to fish. It was about three kilometers from the death camp. There was a town named Borowe. We would often stay overnight there because we were going on Saturday and coming back on Sunday. And we passed through Treblinka a couple of times and we could hear screaming in Treblinka. You could hear shooting when you were passing through Treblinka, because the death camp was about 800 meters from the station, or so I think. I think so—about 700 meters. And you could hear the shooting and the screaming in Treblinka. And all that shooting and screaming happened when they were unloading people from the cars on the platform. And when they were burning the Jews the smell, the stench was so horrible that people couldn't stay in their homes. That means [it was] four or five kilometers away from Treblinka. So [people] would bring torchwood, juniper branches and leaves home because when the wind would blow it was impossible to say at home—the stench from the burned bodies was so potent. Because the Germans hadn't burned the bodies for a while instead they had put them in the ditches. And when more and more people were brought in, thousands, and when the Germans realized that they could lose the war, instead they had to burn the bodies. They were burning the ones who were gassed and they were exhuming from the ditches the ones who were killed before. And that's why there was that smell. What else can I say...? When, that means before the Poles were allowed in the Jewish district, a few days prior all the better things had been taken and these things were transported to—for the

Germans to the Reich. That means better furniture, better clothing—all that was in a better shape was transported to the Reich, to the Germans. Germans always said that they were disgusted by the Jews, but they were not disgusted by Jewish belongings and money; although many of these things had traces of Jewish blood on them. It had all been removed to the Reich. And later they set up a sale in a Jewish prayer house, in a synagogue. That means they took all the shabbier things and they announced that they would have a sale of Jewish clothing, of all that was left: old furniture and so on. And if the Poles didn't buy it would be removed and thrown away somewhere—simply destroyed. So the Poles went to buy different things. And he took—and there was a German and a Polish blue policemen and a magistrate employee, and a German was supervising it. He would take an item from a large pile—lift from a stack. There was a stack of clothing and various other things right where the Jewish altar was. And he took it in his hand—they arranged such—an office worker would lift it up and then the policeman said—asked the German: "How much?" And he would say, "One złoty or two złoty, or 50 groszy. And they were buying. They had clothing and shoe ware and sheets and various pillows. And one day I also went there, because the sale lasted a couple of days. And the Germans took candle holders from a Jewish temple. They took them to for—for forging, for the military *[he shows the Jewish candle holders]*, because brass was used for the needs of the German Army. And I also got a few of such candle holders and I took them home. And now I have these candle holders. I went once to Desa *[it is a well known chain of Polish antique stores]* to have them tell me how many—how old the candle holders could be. About 15 years ago, they told me that they were no less than 160 years old. That means a few generations of Jews prayed by these candle holders. And my mother got something during the sale as well. A German took a cloth covering with fringe form the altar. Jewish devotional articles were covered with it. And he also lifted it up and my mother said, "I will take it and I will have a cover for my side table." And she took it—it is now somewhere in the wardrobe.

[02:] 18:50:14- [02:] 22:26:20
19:29- 23:14

Q: And you said that this sale lasted for a few days?

A: Yes, a few days—until—because Germans wanted to clean it all up. And later they brought a crew. They were Mongols and Ukrainians in German service and they took this prayer house, the synagogue apart. The synagogue was most likely built in 1650 and it was over 350 years old. So the Jews had to be in Sokołów since that time. And there had to be a lot of them since they built such a temple.

Q: And these...

A: The temple was taken down to the very foundation by the Germans in [19]43. In part even—even some foundation stones were removed and taken away, so that nobody could tell.

Q: And at that time the Poles already inhabited the former ghetto, right?

A: Yes, the Poles lived there at that time. Germans made this announcement on purpose, so that there would be no trace that any Jews had ever lived there; to populate the area with Poles.

Q: And you said that there were posters hanging...

A: Yes. There were posters about that size *[he shows 11 inches by 15 inches]* and they said the following: “Shops, workshops, houses at the disposal of the Polish population”, and the last name of a German who signed that poster. His last name, that’s right. I believe it was signed: **Tyborski. Tyborski**... it seems to me.

Q: And... and when the Sokołów Jews returned, the ones who survived the war, what—what happened to them?

A: You know there still remained... Aha, part of the wooden and brick houses Germans had sold to the Polish population in town and in the country. And they ordered to have them taken apart. The worst houses [were] to be sold and to be taken apart—so that they [the Poles] would take them down then. And people from the country bought wooden houses for wood, they were building. Then they were buying brick houses, and all of these remained. And then 50-60 Jews arrived. They were hiding in our area or they came from Russia; because part [of them] ran away with the Russians across the Bug river in [19]39. And they started to sell these houses. And they started to sell 90 percent of the land parcels and the houses. Even my father bought a house like that. We used to live in a formerly Jewish house. The house belonged to... **Abram Szpadel [Schpadel]** sold it to us. My father paid **Abram Szpadel**, because other Jews testified that the house was his, that he was an heir [inherited it] of this house. In three months another heir arrived from Russia—**Wolf [Wólf] Szpadel**. And he said to my father: “Well, you know”, he said “it belongs to me. You”, he said, “had bought it, but I am an even closer (heir) than **Abram**”. Well, my father went to **Aber [Abram]** and said: “Well, sir, I paid you”—and back and forth—”Give him some more.” And my father gave some [money] to **Abram**. About two more months passed and another owner showed up. He [my father] said: “I am not going to pay everybody. You both testified that there are no more heirs, that you are the closest.” And then they said: “Listen, don’t bother that man. We both got money; you go and take another parcel. We will testify that that parcel was yours. And other Jews will

also testify that it was yours. Nobody will contradict us because all documents got burned during the war." And they used to do that. They were selling one, five, six parcels, five, six houses. Later some of them left for Łódź. Some of them left...

Q: That means that they were selling the houses in which the Poles had lived since the war, right?

[02:] 22:26:20- [02:] 25:40:15
23:14- 26:36

A: Yes, that's right, that's right. They were selling them.

Q: Only the deed [a document testifying ownership]...

A: The deed—because during the rule of— these houses were—these simply were nobody's houses. They were former German houses. The Germans took these houses and then you made house payments to the management group. Later when the Germans left, after the occupation, the Poles continued to live there, but the Germans were the owners. And later these houses and these parcels of land were sold by the Jews who survived.

Q: And did Sokołów Jews stay here very long while they were selling the houses?

A: They stayed here since, likely, [19]48. Because all arrangements regarding the house sale lasted a very long time. You had to go through court, and obtain—and find all the additional witnesses. And some other Jew would live in another city and you had to get him to testify that it belonged to him and so on; so it lasted quite a while. I remember the last one named **Szymek [Szymon]** who left for Israel and **Mośko [Mojsze] Sztutman [Stuttmann, Stutman]**. They lived in a mill. They sold the mill of **Nut [Nuta] Gurfinkel [Gurfinkiel];** that means, they were some relatives of **Nut Gurfinkel,** who didn't survive. They sold the mill to the **Maksjan's** and then left for Israel at last. Later he wrote a letter, that he would like return to Poland, because there [Israel], he said, he was not used to that climate, and for him, he said, it was hard [to live] in that climate. Yes, sir. So that is, in short, what I said.

Q: Yes. And when the Jews came here after the war...

A: Yes.

Q: And then it would turn out, that, for example, some owner of a house or of a parcel of land survived—were there no misunderstandings that these houses weren't theirs, but were Polish instead?

A: You know, he had to have it on paper, written—from the court—he simply had the property ownership acknowledged in court. He took the case to court and court... Based on witnesses [witnesses' testimony] the court acknowledged that he was the owner of a given house. And—he [they] sold it that way. And we also have such a deed, although the house is already sold, because now I live here and my parents aren't alive anymore. But we have a deed like that—that it was the house belonging to such and such owner. And on such and such basis, others testified that he was the closest heir, the such and such. And that is how these houses were sold. What's left from Jewish houses is the women's prayer house (in Polish: "bożnica żeńska"). It was a building where women prayed alone. And there is also a house where the Jewish Council was located. It was an office before the war, a Jewish office. Before the war we would call it a parish, a Jewish parish. And there is also... Yes, there is a rabbi's house. The house where the rabbi used to live is already sold. His name was **Morgensztejn [Morgenstein]**.

Q: After the war were there any... Did it ever happen that somebody would beat a Jew for example? Because—when they [the Jews] were coming back to towns such things happened.

[02:] 25:40:15- [02:] 27:29:06
26:36- 28:29

A: We didn't have anything like that. It happened in other towns but also some Jews acted wrongly. They came back from Russia, they signed up for State Security Office "Urząd Bezpieczeństwa" [UB, the security service of the communist government of Poland]; there were two of them. Their name was Figowy, their last name. Their father was a nurse *(in Polish: "felczer", this profession doesn't exist any more; felczer was qualified to perform simple medical procedures and uncomplicated surgeries).* They both came back from Russia they went to the UB. And together with **NKWD** (Russian: The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs was the public and secret police organization of the Soviet Union that directly executed the rule of power of the Soviets) and with the UB they were going around the villages and catching Polish farmers and sending them out to Siberia. These two acted badly, but not the others. There were no others. They were eyed with suspicion. Because you know, when they were here before, they knew the Poles. They were young. First they were in the Jewish police, first they were beating the Jews and then they lef [unfinished: left]—they signed up for the UB and together with the Russians they were catching Poles and taking them to Siberia.

Q: But... How did they manage to be in the Jewish police and run away to Russia?

A: They were in the Jewish police and when the Russians... One was in the Jewish... They were together...This is how it was: one of them was in till the end and the other ran away with the Russians, most likely. That's what I was told at least. One was in the Jewish police, and he ran away from the police force before the ghetto was liquidated. He was hidden by a farmer and there he survived. Then the one from Russia came back. And both of them were later in Sokołów. And both went to the UB. Once when they went on a hunt, one of them was wounded by those, who didn't want to go to Siberia. And they left after that accident, most likely to Warsaw and then to Łódź, and then they left Poland.

Q: And they were from here, from Sokołów?

A: From Sokołów, yes. Their father was a respectable—a respectable, well known nurse he was.

Q: Fine, thank you very much. Perhaps my friends might have a few questions when they come.

[02:] 27:29:06- [02:] 28:09:16
28:29- 29:11
[After a break]

A: Her husband was a carpenter. And the people started to talk among themselves. She was hearing and the other Jews were hearing that Germans would start killing Jews. And she said this: "It is not... Madam", she said to my mother, "it is not possible that Jews would perish. The world with no Jews is like a bun with no yeast. Jews cannot perish." And later it happened differently. That means that not all the Jews believed that Jews would perish. But it was only [19]41 or the beginning of [19]42, and we still lived in the ghetto. And she said: "It is not possible..." She was older and she also...

Q: I am sorry; please don't get up yet... *[Technical difficulties]*

[02:] 28:09:16- [02:]:30:49:11
29:11- 31:58
[Another interviewer]

Q: When the Jews lived in Sokołów before the war, did they live on one street or were they scattered in town somehow? What did it look like?

A: They mainly lived in one district, they lived in one district. But there were also those who lived... because this district was frequently spread apart. They mainly lived in the center

of town, because Jews were merchants and tradesmen, and trade and commerce was conducted in the center of town. So everything was mainly—they mainly gathered downtown, but there were also such—there were also such.... Some of them were, lived in Polish districts. This is how it was: when a Polish district was ending and a Jewish district was beginning or conversely —a Jewish district [was ending] and a Polish district was beginning then some lived a little over here or a little over there. Just like we used to live; it was a Jewish district but the outskirts of a Jewish district, but still a Jewish district.

Q: Very well. During the war, was there a work camp only for Jews that had barracks or so? Were the Jews working on something? Were they used for work?

A: They were used for work. The Jews were used to remove snow from the roads. There came—Germans came to the Jewish Council and they appointed that so many Jews [are needed] for snow removal. Young people with shovels [needed to be] delivered for cleaning snow from the roads. The Jews also went to work in German warehouses. A German magazine was located in an old, closed mill on Nieciecka Street**.** I saw personally when the Jews were carrying various pieces of German equipment, they shook out German blankets, and they tidied up. I saw that personally, it was [19]41.

Q: But there was no camp or barracks?

A: No, there wasn't.

Q: And they were just taken from the ghetto to...

A: Yes from the ghetto and in town or near town. And now what else? They went there to—they were cleaning around where the Germans were stationed. Now—the Jews were liquidating the Jewish cemetery. There was a Jewish cemetery and they were removing stones [grave stones].

Q: This old Jewish cemetery?

A: Yes this cemetery. And they stopped longer near one of grave stones. They were wondering whether to remove a stone or not. And my mother said—asked, "Why are you not taking that stone off?" and one of the Jews said, "Oh, madam, a rabbi is buried here. A rabbi, who used to live 300 years ago", he said, "under this stone." And after a few minutes of thinking it over, they took the stone off. The same with the rest of the cemetery. And the road where the Germans were stationing was paved with these stones.

Germans paved their road with Jewish monuments *[he likely meant: gravestones]*. Where they walked, they walked on Jewish grave stones.

[02:]:30:49:11- [02]30:26:04
31:58- 33:39

Q: And what happened to the gravestones later?

A: These gravestones—a terrace on the present-day Szewski Rynek Street was built out of some of them. Only the inscriptions are turned to the inside. They are not on the outside, but they are inside. Sandstones are smoother, so the Germans paved their sidewalks with them, right where they were stationing. And after the war some of these stones were simply moved. They were taken. I have a piece myself of a Germ [unfinished: German]—Jewish stone with some letters. Here in my back yard—such a small piece.

Q: Do you remember Gramms the county elder (Polish: “starosta powiatowy”)? Did you hear anything about him?

A: I remember him. I saw him briefly when he was walking with his guards in the town square. He was a very, very, very typical Germanic type, a very bad German. Not only for Poles—not only for Jews but also for Poles. And he was building the death camp in Treblinka. Most likely he was the instigator to build the camp, to build it right here, and not somewhere else.

Q: But there were two camps in Treblinka...

A: Yes. There was a work camp for Poles and a death camp for Jews, yes. The work camp was for the Poles. The Poles who didn’t meet quota or who dodged work for the Germans got into the work camp. For little things... They trespassed against the occupants. He sent...

Q: Did the Sokołów Jews also go to the work camp?

[02]30:26:04- [02:] 35:47:12
33:39- 37:08

A: No, the Jews only built that camp. The death camp was built by the Sokołów Jews. I even personally knew the Jews, who built the camps in Treblinka and in Szczeglacin, because one of them was our neighbor. He lived in the next house. His name was **Abram**, his name was **Ciepelewicz**.

Q: And did he return here?

A: Yes, he did. They built the camp and the Jews came [back]. And only after the camp was built they opened the death camp, a few weeks afterwards.

Q: And I will also ask this: how soon could the Sokołów Jews have known about what was happening inside the Treblinka camp?

A: Because the transports from Warsaw were coming, and transports from other cities were coming but the people were not coming back from the camp. And after all the Jews had, how do you say it, Polish friends, who were telling them about what was going on in the camp in Treblinka. Just like when the Jews sent my father to go...

Q: To Sobibór.

A: To Sobibór, yes. Because on the sixth of June a transport of Jews was sent from Chełmno and they didn't come back. So what happened to these Jews? The Jews from Chełmno should give some answer to my father, and...

Q: So you think that they knew quite early about the inner workings of the camp in Treblinka.

A: They knew. Maybe 90 percent believed, only not all believed, that they would be going to go so fast to that death camp. They believed that it would last for a while, that it will still, still, still, still...

Q: Did you see or hear about any forms of resistance among the Jews? That they.... Not simply ran away, but that they were defending themselves, throwing stones, shooting? Did you...

A: No. I don't know anything about that; nothing on that subject. I don't know, but there was a rumor that when the Russians entered in [19]39—before the war there was an organization "Strzelec" at the stadium. And a local government—a temporary local government was created. And the Jews allegedly—together with the Russians they were supposed to have taken the rifles from "Strzelec" from the stadium. And then those rifles were supposed to be put away *[or assembled; it is the same word: "złożyć" in Polish]* in the Jewish district. But it was only talk. If they were stored there then the weapons would be theirs and they could use them. But apparently the weapons weren't stored in the ghetto and only were taken to the east by the Russians in [19]39. So over here—there was no resistance. The Jews simply thought that the meeker they would be and the better they would listen the longer they would be left alone. Aha, and the Jews were also buying

themselves out from the Germans, just like in the ghetto in Kosowo they were buying themselves out.... That is gol [unfinished: gold]—they were told to collect that and so much money and then they wouldn't go to the death camp in Treblinka. So the Jews were collecting gold, jewelry, and money. The Germans would take it and things were quiet for a while. Later they would issue another ordinance to assemble a certain amount of money. And they were getting the money and the gold out and then...

Q: And how do you know about it? Was it discussed in Sokołów?

A: Yes, it was. But I didn't witness that.

[02:] 35:47:12
37:08
Conclusion of Interview

Translated by Agnieszka McClure on 01/13/2011.