

SMORUG, Zofia
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
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In this interview, Zofia Smorug, born in 1923 and a local resident of Tarnòw, discusses roundups of Jews by the Germans, during the war and the evacuation of the Ghetto. She speaks about her Jewish friend Rut **Wilsztain [Weltstein?]** her family. She also recalls a Jewish woman who survived by hiding in a village with a family which had a disabled child, whom she eventually raised.

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Part1

Zofia tells us about herself.

[01:] 01:25:22 - [01:] 04:27:18

00:00 - 04:32

Q: (Mrs.) Zofia once more please state your name and when you were born.

- A: Smorug, Zofia, fifteenth of the second twenty three (15th February 1923) in Szczurnowa.
- Q: Near Tarnów?
- A: Near Tarnów; it was then the District of Brzesk but later Tarnów County when the county was created.
- Q: How old were you when you came to Tarnów?
- A: Six years old. I started the First Grade here.
- Q: And you have lived in Tarnów for your entire life?
- A: Yes, I have spent my whole life in Tarnów.
- Q: Zofia, when the war broke out you were 16 years old?
- A: Yes, 16 years old. I was in my sixteenth year and I was attending technical school. But the school was closed down and I could not get into any other school during the war. One of my sisters did get to a school and my other sister had already matriculated before the war and went to work. But I in [19]40... but if I remember properly in [19]42, I received a notice to go to Germany (to report for work in Germany). Because I was very petite, you could encircle my waist with two hands, my parents were worried about me, that I would simply be unable to manage work in Germany and looked for contacts to simply to save me from this. One of my working sister's friends arranged for me to work in her friend's shop with cobblers' accessories at Brama Piłźnieńska. The shop was linked to the cobbler's workshop. The shop owner was making shoes for the Gestapo as well as making for the so-called Arbientzenter it was probably called so. Afterwards. And he (the shop owner) got for me a placement (in his shop) and they cancelled that (the notice to go to Germany). And for more or less during the entire occupation I had to work in this shop because I was afraid that if I resigned they would take me in the end (to Germany) because I would not get anywhere to a school.
- Q: And where were you living at the time?
- A: Mościcki Street. At number 120 Mościcki Street.
- Q: Therefore you were going to work across the Market Square. Yes?
- A: Yes. I went Mościcki Street via the Krakow Cinema, coming out onto Krakowska Street and from Krakowska Street I went across the Market Square, Wekslarska Street, I got to the corner of Wekslarska Street, where at present there is a bank, only on the other side was a house, Zakątna Street, the corner of Zakątna Street and Wekslarska Street—

Part 2

Discussion about the Wilsztain [Weltstein?] family.

[01:] 04:27:18 - [01:] 07:45:13
04:32 – 07:57

Q: And can you remember—

A: Żydowska Street but I was going along Wekslarska Street.

Q: Everyday the same route, more or less yes?

A: More or less the same route.

Q: Zofia what month was it or at least which season when you started to work there?

A: Well, winter certainly not but I cannot remember exactly now; was it immediately at the beginning of spring? Or do I know, it's difficult to remember. I know that it was sometime, probably [19]42 when the Jews were not yet in the ghettos and were still living in their own private houses. It was only later that they began to take Jews to the ghetto and the family which I knew; on Mościcki Street, I had two friends, whose family were taken to the ghetto towards the very end. And from the entire family probably only one person is alive, I don't know if at this moment if this person is still alive but anyway the person somehow survived. It was a teacher of the name **Wilsztain [Weltstein?]**

Q: And the whole family had this surname, or—

A: There was. This family was as follows –The father was a rabbi, the son was teacher, the daughter worked for the courts. The widow had two daughters, her name was probably Ausenberg, if I remember. One daughter was called Rut, the other Mila and there was still a married couple with a small son who was called Monek but I cannot remember their surname. He owned a mill on Lwowska Street and the entire family...and at the same time they had a farm and a house on Mościcki Street. And in the courtyard lived a family which worked on that farm. And I was friends with the elder daughter, Rut because she was more or less—

Q: With Rut?

A: Yes, She was my age.

Q: Could you say something more about Rut and what you did together and the friendship was like?

A: Well quite simply like children, well, well, well—

Q: But it was already wartime. Was it then when you met or earlier?

A: It was before the war.

Q: Before the war?

A: From before the war.

Q: Did you have contact with them during the war?

A: Yes of course.

Q: As you were already working in the cobbler's shop?

A: Yes, yes, I was informing them—

Q: Therefore it was already (19) '42.

A: I was informing them what was happening and they were very upset by it.

Q: What were you informing them about?

A: Well, well, for example about er... when I was running across the Market, how the Jews there were on their knees.

Part3
About the Jews kneeling in the market square.

[01:] 07:45:13 – [01] 10:54:11
07:57 – 11: 14

Q: Could you please say about this? How was it from the beginning?

A: Tell about the Jews?

Q: May be so if we have begun.

A: Therefore when I was coming back from work sometime during the afternoon between 15:00 and 16:00. I cannot tell you to the minute. I was walking across the Market Square in the direction of Krakowska Street, because in the middle of the Market Square was the Town Hall therefore the Krakowska Street wasn't visible from behind the Town Hall. And as I was coming out, mmm, from the spot where the Town Hall is I could see male Jews, only male Jews. Two rows of Jews, kneeling with raised arms.

Q: Only men?

A: Men.

Q: May be children?

A: No there were only men. What I could see as it lasted only a few minutes precisely. I stopped and didn't know what to do. And along the rows were Germans walking and there were dogs. Two if I remember correctly. And Germans with riding whips and guns were going along that. When they spotted me one of the Germans shouted "**raus**" and then I started to run convinced that they would shoot me. Simply that is why they told me to run (so they could shoot me). But somehow luck was on my side so that within 10 minutes I covered what usually took me 20 minutes. I reached home and for half an hour, well...well, I did not say a word. Quite simply from shock as it was a terrible sight.

- Q: Yes but how many Jews could there have been? How many did you see in the square at the Market?
- A: From the beginning of the Town Hall from the steps side, those which you go down **burek**, more or less up to where the chemist's shop was. Therefore to the other side of the Market, so, so , along . *[indicating]*
- Q: It is the north side?
- A: North side and two, two rows.
- Q: And under the arcades were any sitting there, or?
- A: No. It was more or less like that, you described this correctly, it was more or less up to the arcades where it reached. Well I don't know it could have been around 200 people, may be a bit more. Well, well, of course I didn't have time to count because it only lasted seconds.
- Q: Did they have any luggage with them?
- A: No because they held their hands up and I didn't see anything simply I didn't see anything lying on the ground.
- Q: They were kneeling, yes?

Part 4
Speaks about German uniforms.

[01] 10:54:11 – [01]12:58:04
11: 14 – 13:19

- A: They were kneeling with their hands raised. And Germans walked with guns *[shows with her hand how the Germans held people at pistol point]* and the dogs were also going along the rows. And I thought that after I had passed that I heard a shot, but I am not sure I may just imagined it. My memory may have created it from the fear; I may have imagined that they were shooting. At least I know they were kneeling and the Germans held guns in their hands. How many Germans there were I don't know.
- Q: Can you remember what kind of uniform they had, what colour?
- A: Similar to Gestapo.
- Q: Therefore?
- A: They had round hats, *[gesticulating a round item of headwear, by making round circles around her head]* like that and jackboots, it was actually characteristic of the Gestapo men they were wearing jackboots, long up to *[indicates knee length]*.
- Q: So it could have been Gestapo, yes?

A: Yes, it was how it looked to me.

Q: The colour of the uniform may have stuck in your memory?

A: Well, like steel-grey it resembled steel-grey like the German uniforms more or less what the Gestapo were wearing.

Q: Did some of them have helmets on or not, or only hats?

A: No, no. Round hats.

Q: OK. Did you see there any drastic incidents; did any of the Germans hit anyone?

A: No, no.

Q: Only that shot, which may be you think you imagined afterwards.

A: Yes, yes but it was probably a real shot. One of the Jews may have lowered his hands and then they could have fired. Because their arms would have got tired. Because for example when they took the Jews out of the ghetto and one of the Jews to say if he lowered his arms, they were carrying bundles with them, everything that they could carry.

Part 5 **Round ups and shooting in the Jewish district**

[01]12:58:04 – [01]16:53:01
13:19 – 18:28

Q: And that you saw with your own eyes?

A: Yes I also saw that on Lwowska Street.

Q: On Lwowska Street?

A: And from there you could hear shots, they were shooting at them and they were dropping own on the street.

Q: That was later when they were taking the Jews (from the ghetto)?

A: That was later when they clearing the ghetto, but the earlier incident was before the ghetto. (was established)

Q: Yes.

A: And the round-ups of the Jews which I have spoken about when they were hunting them along these streets, because Rybna Street, Żydowska Street, Zakątna Street, the whole Market Square, Wekslarska Street, it was all mostly Jewish, their shops and they lived there. Therefore you could often see the Germans circling in the area. And authentically I saw one thing; how a German chased a young Jew from *Szklarska* (or *Skarska*) the

German was really moving, he had long trousers but no jackboots, he had military style trousers and uniform like a soldier, like a soldier with a gun in his hand, he was chasing after him and on Brama Piłźnieński Street he shot at him... (the young Jew)

Q: You actually saw this?

A: --wounding him in the leg.

Q: Excuse me but did it all happen in front of you; the shot?

A: Yes, yes, yes. And the boy still managed to spring up, then he was howling like a dog (in pain) and the German chased after him and they turned into Szeroka Street and I couldn't see if he finished him off. At least there was the shot and he fell at the time of the shot. And the second time I saw twice as they were chasing older Jews but that time they were not shooting in front of me because they were chasing them up to Lwowska Street and turned into Wałowa Street or Szeroka Street; one into Wałowa Street and one into Szeroka Street and it finished and that.

Q: They were chasing older Jews, yes?

A: Yes.

Q: What was it like?

A: Well simply a Jew was running away dressed and the (German) with a gun in his hand (pistol) chased after him. Chased after him and he didn't shoot only chased after him probably to get him in range to shoot, because there was quite a distance between the German and the (Jew). First you could see the Jew running and afterwards after him to say after a few minutes the German showed up and chased after him but already here at the turning I could see how they both getting to Wałowa Street as he (the Jew) was reaching Wałowa Street; the other one was coming out from Żydowska Street, the German, such that was the distance more or less between them so I don't know would the shot have reached him then or not, nevertheless he ran after him with a gun in his hand.

Q: You didn't hear the shot afterwards?

A: With the first Jew I heard but here I didn't hear the shots but he shot him for sure because there was no chance that he didn't reach him because there were very few people in the street and you would have to run away very fast so he (the German) couldn't (run) the 100 metres or 50 metres to get him so he could fire at him. But it was too far well because the whole Piłźnieńska Brama Street divided me from them so you couldn't hear the shot.

Part 6

Taking Jews from their homes, murdering them and transporting their bodies.

**[01]16:53:01 – [01]19:40:19
18:28 – 20:22**

Q: They are all, I mean the last incidents, from before the liquidation of the ghetto, yes?

- A: Yes. And still about the truck with the Jews. So they were coming out of Żydowska Street it stopped at the gates of a tenement house and the other tenement houses were on the corner of Wałowa Street, that one, in Brama Piłźnieńska Street. And they stopped on Brama Piłźnieńska Street, the Jews opened the tarpaulin and on the back of the truck like that (gesticulating) stacked up like three or four layers were Jews laying and the truck was dripping with blood. And then the Jews went with the Germans to the tenement house.
- Q: What Jews?
- A: Well the policemen with the stars, there was such a Jewish police (force).
- Q: They were escorting a load of corpses?
- A: Yes, yes, yes.
- Q: How many of them? (Policemen)
- A: Two, there were two (Jewish police) and two Germans, also in round hats.
- Q: With jackboots?
- A: Sorry?
- Q: Were they also wearing jackboots, I mean also Gestapo?
- A: I didn't take any notice of the boots but, I don't remember, but the hats were round. And they held guns, both held guns. And they were taking the Jew by the arms, he was in a long white shirt and had on his head such a [*gesticulating a round item of headwear*] **kippah**, like our priests wear, something like that [*again gesticulating*]. When they got to the truck, one of the Germans shot him and probably ordered the other Jews to throw him (his corpse) into the back of the truck. They threw him (the corpse) into the back of the truck, closed it up and went in the direction of Lwowska Street, but they were going somewhere far, they didn't turn anywhere just kept going straight along Lwowska Street. May be to a wood may be somewhere to bury the Jews.
- Q: Who was shooting? The German?
- A: The German.
- Q: And the Jewish policemen were doing the loading on—?
- A: Onto the lorry.
- Q: Did it look like that they were going to pre-selected addresses and pulling them out from their homes.
- A: Yes, yes, that's what it looked like; some were dressed and others were in their underwear.

Q: As if they had been sleeping?

A: From bed.

Q: Therefore, I don't know, from one's own hearth?

Part 7

Story of a woman who was hidden in a village and brought up the farmer's handicapped son.

[01]19:40:19 – [01]23:30:09
20:22 – 24:22

A: And often there were hunts for the Jews, in that district, because Polish people who were, um, partly living in those Jewish houses, simply they were giving shelter to the Jews, in the attics and in the cellars, they were providing them with food. And they had there some kind of improvised ovens which they had made and simply were warming up the food at night. And then the smoke came out from the chimneys (of these ovens) and the Germans found out from somewhere about this and were searching by the smoking chimneys and then they would (search) the whole tenement house from top to bottom, that is what I heard from other people who were living there, they took people from the tenement houses.

Q: And did you know such people, who hid Jews? Did you hear about it? [*Zofia sits back in order to hear better*] Please sit back, please sit back

A: Not personally, before the war, during the occupation I didn't hear anything only after the war I was working in an office with a friend who was Jewish (woman) she had been a teacher at the Eliza Orzeszkowa Grammar school in Tarnów and she had been hidden by a family in the countryside. And she was tell..., there was there a little boy, and she was tending the fire for the oven for the farmer. And she was called Franciszka; I don't know if it was an adopted name, or if it was her real name, I know that she was called Kryształ because the name was in our personal register. And after the war she came to Tarnów with that little boy, and she was married, husband probably died in the ghetto.

Q: I'm sorry with the boy?

A: With the boy. Who was little there. He was sat by her (on the floor) and she would tell him about the world, she was teaching him Polish history, and on the whole she was teaching him about the world. And said that she will make a (decent) man out of him. And for sure she kept her word.

Q: That was a Jewish boy, yes?

A: No it was the son of that farmer, that farmer. And she brought him to Tarnów and they were living along Targowa Street, he was handicapped, she gave him the ability to work as an artisan. And she lived with him until the end of her life. And he was looking after her. And she died of cancer in Tarnów. I even attended her funeral in Tarnów Hospital, she was buried in Tarnów Cemetery. I have been in that chapel, where the body is washed and prepared (according to the Jewish ritual Taharah) for burial, then, then at the

funeral. Because few Jews survived here in Tarnów. One even, I didn't know his name, he often came to visit her. And he later led the funeral, he sang at the funeral. And she wasn't buried in a coffin only in a sitting up position with her face to the east; as it is apparently when the resurrection comes the first to raise up (from the dead) are those who are sitting.

Part 8

Story of the only surviving member of the Wilsztain [Weltstein?] family.

[01]23:30:09 – [01]26:22:15

24:22 – 27:21

Q: Did you meet more Jews like that after the war who managed to survive?

A: No. I heard only about the one Jew, but I cannot remember from who, who lived along Mościcki Street, where I knew the whole family. That... somehow it was possible for him to run away, that **Wilsztain [Weltstein?]** and that he apparently came here to Poland and that somebody took over the property and that he came here to Poland to try to legally reprocess his property. How this finished I don't know because I moved away from there in a fairly short time. And I was living on another street nearby and then along Starowolski Street also, I know nothing more.

Q: That's the **Wilsztain [Weltstein?]** family where you had the friend Rut?

A: Yes, Rut.

Q: Do you know what happened to her?

A: Apparently they all died.

Q: At first taken to the ghetto?

A: Very late, in the last stage, they were nearly, nearly, nearly the last people taken. Because by the way the younger daughter was a very beautiful girl, brunette, charming girl. And a German spotted her somewhere in the street and they were (2 sisters) walking around without the star, which Jews had to compulsorily wear on the sleeve, because they did not look like Israeli women. And somehow I don't know was it by his patronage or, or, something else was the reason that she, long time, that the entire family lived outside of the ghetto and then at the very end of the ghetto (ghetto's existence) they were taken, the whole family.

Q: That was what you heard, you didn't have any contact with Rut, you didn't have then?

A: No, no.

Q: That was what you found out afterwards? Do you remember any more examples when were walking about did you see beatings of Jews, or ...in the town? Before the interview you were telling me about the incident on Brama Piłźnieńska Street...with an elderly Jewish man. Or have I mixed something up?

A: No, no, no. I have already said about that, that the old Jew ran away. That the old Jew—

Q: That is, that you already told us?

A: Yes, Yes.

Q: That is that—Excuse me.

A: Well you can check on the piece of paper.

Part 9
About the evacuation of the Ghetto.

[01]26:22:15 – [01]28:47:17

27:21 – 29:52

Q: Oh, well yes! It is written here. Does anything from before the evacuation of the ghetto stick in your memory? Some drastic event; connected to the Jews?

A: Well, I personally wasn't anti-Semitic, my entire family wasn't either. And my father worked in the Post Office because he had quite good wages, so we were buying on credit from a Jewish shop and settling the bill on the first of every month and so I had this type of contact (with the Jews). In another Jewish shop in the Market Square we also were buying there. But I wanted to say something but it's gone from my memory—

Q: That's alright, may be we will somehow remember it later. And now I would like to ask you again about the clearing of the ghetto (which you saw).

A: Aha! Still about the ghetto. Therefore one day a cobbler was coming back from his home on Wers—, on Wekslarska Street, he was coming back after breakfast from his home, and I had just arrived at the shop (where she worked) it was already open, and he said 'come, come, look they are taking the Jews from the ghetto'. Well and then the cobbler's workers went to the window and I with them. Because it was a quite a distance because they were coming out from the ghetto going along Lwowska Street to Dąbrowski Street and the freight train station. And this continued for a few hours, that, that march. They didn't walk in rows, to say like in ranks as with the army, only they were going only a few in a row and carried some baggage, their most treasured possessions.

Part 10
About forced labour for the Germans.

[01]28:47:17 – [01]31:40:03

29:52 – 32:52

Excuse me but I don't know still will this be of any importance. It's just come to me now about the time when they (the Germans) caught me I will still say something because it is also linked to Jews. It was at the end of the war or just before the end. It was 1944 I think how they caught us and took us via the Gestapo offices and took us to the **Todt** (Forced Labour Organisation after 1942 roughly) Organisation who was building bridges.

Q: But excuse me, why did they take you?

A: They simply caught us for work. And we were thinking that they will, and there with the others I don't know what they had done, maybe [sent them] to Oświęcim (Auschwitz) because there were crowds of youths in that High School, in that boarding-school but they only picked 20 people. There were a few of us, a few girls and a few young boys. So we were allocated work by the Germans. And I was allocated to such a terrible tent and there was such a mountain of crockery, but it really was a mountain of crockery. And to sort it out. They had belonged to the Jews but had been confiscated and we had to sort; separately, knives separately, forks separately, spoons separately. And I was doing the sorting for a while after that the men were sent to cut wood because of the cauldrons, because they had barracks built there, officers were there and a kitchen as well. And such women, well built girls, the Germans were taking for cleaning rooms. But, some of them gave away the secret that they were sexually exploited at the same time. But they were like that, but I was petite therefore they didn't go for me. Afterwards I was taken to the kitchens and there were Austrian-Germans there who were kindly people, very kindly people. Therefore they didn't give me hard work only peeling potatoes and other vegetables, and big cauldrons they made the men wash, and the men did it. And we were getting then quarter of a loaf of bread and a small piece of marmalade to take home. But I will never forget that tent with that, with that, crockery.

Part 11

More about the evacuation of the Ghetto.

[01]31:40:03 – [01]34:01:04

32:52 – 35:18

Q: I would still to go back to the liquidation of the ghetto to the march of the Jews. You saw it from where?

A: I saw it perfectly through the window.

Q: Through the shop window?

A: You could see from there perfectly.

Q: The window looked out onto the street where—?

A: On Lwowska Street because; Brama Piłźnieńska Street is with runs into, runs out of Brama Piłźnieńska Street straight into Lwowska Street. And Dąbrowska Street you know where it is or not?

Q: More or less.

A: It's where the local buses turn, local buses turning when they are going from—

Q: OK, we know where it is, but Zofia what did those Jews look like?

A: Dressed?

Q: Dressed.

A: They were dressed normally like, well, with beards; they were wearing hats like Jewish hats, **kippah**. Like that *[indicating with a circular motion to her head]* like that some of them had on their heads. Well, women normally like any other woman. The only difference was that they were carrying bundles with them. Well they walked, there were dogs near them and Germans carried firearms, firearms but handguns. And from time to time you could hear some shots, you could hear.

Q: It was heard?

A: Yes you could hear.

Q: You didn't see it?

A: I saw that may be two people fell but afterwards the crowd moved—

Q: But they fell from exhaustion or from a shot?

A: I don't know that because it was too far away, it was too great a distance.

Q: Did they get up afterwards?

A: People simply moved on, they were hurried on therefore they could have even walked over it (them), and I couldn't watch that all of the time to the end because, because it lasted for hours.

Q: Hours?

A: Yes it lasted hours. Therefore I was there for a while but I was afraid for my own skin, so from time to time I watched it and again I moved away so nobody could catch me watching because after all Germans could be going around and checking to see if anybody is observing this.

Q: Those who were guarding them? Those Germans who, so the Germans walked along the sides?

A: On the sides Germans with dogs were walking along.

Part 12 About Uniforms.

**[01]34:01:04 – [01]35:39:06
35:18 – 37:01**

Q: Can you remember the colour of the uniforms?

A: The colour of the uniforms was more or less similar to those who were shooting.

Q: Aha. Therefore what (colour)?

- A: Yes, it looked to me that it was probably Gestapo because they were also in jackboots.
- Q: And in flat hats, yes?
- A: Round ones.
- Q: In any case not in helmets?
- A: And in helmets as well.
- Q: In helmets as well?
- A: As well, wearing helmets as well.
- Q: And may be they had here [*indicating his neck probably*] metal half-moons, no can't you remember?
- A: I don't remember that.
- Q: And were there apart from Germans anybody, I don't know; Jewish police, blue police (Polish)?
- A: Jewish police were there as well.
- Q: Yes. How did they behave?
- A: Well! They just walked along making sure that the Jews kept moving.
- Q: Not hitting anybody?
- A: No.
- Q: Did the Polish blue police take part in this?
- A: No, no what I saw the Polish police wasn't there any Jewish (police) and Germans.
- Q: And do you know of any other examples of Polish blue police having any involvement with Jews in any way?
- A: No.
- Q: May be still with the evacuation (of the Jews) there were other uniformed types of services; fire brigade or **balgins [bauginst]**?
- A: No, no there were not.
- Q: Ok, I would thank you now. I don't know still my friends would have (questions) who were (recording). We thank you very much, beautiful interview. It will certainly be very useful. After four, five months we will send you—

Conclusion of Interview.

Translated by: Evan McGilvray
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