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KRUSIŃSKA, Zofia
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
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This interview was conducted with Zofia Krusińska, born on January 24, 1910, in Borysław (present-day Ukraine), who, following the deaths of both of her parents, went with her siblings to live with her uncle in Krosno. She describes her arrest in Krosno by the Gestapo, her subsequent interrogation, and her internment in the Szebnie concentration camp. She recounts the cruel treatment of the prisoners, especially the Jews, and describes the living conditions in the camp. She recalls events in the camp including a performance by Jewish actors in the camp in Szebnie and the escape of a Jewish prisoner. Toward the end of the interview she describes her involvement in the Polish Home Army, *Armia Krajowa* (AK).

Box 1, Tape 1

[01:] 00:51:17 – [01:] 12:02:17
00:00 – 11:57

Krusińska begins by explaining she was arrested by the Gestapo on October 29, 1942; says she does not know what she was charged with; reports that one of her brothers who was a captain in the army was also arrested and taken to a camp in Germany; says her other brother, who lived with her in Krosno and worked at the airport at the time, was also arrested; says he returned home from work the day the Germans arrived, and that they beat and arrested him; says that during that time she was making good money as a seamstress, so she bought a radio, but her brother did not know about it because it was hidden; reports that one of the Germans discovered it, and he was subsequently released; says he never went back to work at the airport but was able to escape; says both of her brothers are now deceased; describes her interrogation by the Gestapo; recalls that she was asked whether she knew certain people, how she met them, and under what circumstances; speculates that she had been reported to the Germans by someone; recalls that she was asked about a woman whose husband was in the Criminal Police, "Kriminalpolizei"; recalls that she often spoke with this woman not knowing who her husband was; says that during the interrogation she never admitted to knowing any of the people she was being asked about so she was beaten several times; recalls that a German hit her arm with a rifle causing her to lose the use of her right hand; says that she was hit in her ear as well, causing a loss of hearing in the right ear; says she was covered with blood and finally lost consciousness and fell on the ground; recalls that she was interrogated several times by different Germans over the course of six weeks and finally put in prison in Krosno; reports that the prison was located in the courthouse across the street from the Gestapo headquarters; recalls that from Krosno, she was taken to a concentration camp in Szebnie; says that many people were arrested, so one group was taken to Szebnie and the other to Oświęcim (Auschwitz); says that from Krosno they were put on the train to Jasło and from there they walked to Szebnie; recalls that they were supervised by one Polish and two German policemen.

[01:] 12:02:18 – [01:] 20:27:13
11:58 – 20:26

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Krusińska describes the concentration camp in Szebnie where she was interned from October until late August 1942, when she was transported to Germany; reports that it was also a Jewish camp; claims that thousands of Jews were buried in the nearby woods; says she knows this from Polish prisoners who were digging pits for graves; reports that she was told that the Jews were transported to the woods where they were ordered to undress and throw all their gold and other valuables in a pile, and then they were shot by machine gun; recalls that she saw Jews in the Szebnie camp every day as the Jewish barracks were located not too far from the Polish ones; mentions that she saw them during roll call because this took place at the same time for all prisoners; states that roll call of Jewish prisoners took place every time there was a new group of Jews transported into the camp; says they were then put on a truck, taken to the woods, and murdered; recalls an incident that happened one day during a roll call of Jews: they were ordered to give up their valuables, but one woman who had a bag full of gold refused to do so, and she was shot and wounded; recalls that for the next three days she was forced to walk in circles until she finally died; crying, talks about the horrible, cruel, and inhumane treatment of the Jews and Poles by the Germans; recalls a governor from Krakow named **Franz** who used to come to their camp during the roll call for Poles; also mentions a governor from **Zakopane** and **Nowy Sącz** but cannot recall their names; describes how they would pick every tenth prisoner from the line to be hanged at the gallows; recalls that she saw those executions every day during the roll calls that took place in the morning, noon and evening and sometimes in the middle of the night; states that there were five gallows at the camp but that none of them were within the Jewish area of the camp because the Jews were transported to the woods to be killed.

[01:] 20:27:14 – [01:] 27:03:04
20:27 – 27:06

Krusińska talks about the Jews in the Szebnie camp and about the prisoners helping them; states that whenever they had a chance, they ran over to the Jews to see if they needed anything; recalls that they always asked for something to eat as they were very hungry; says that when they got a piece of bread they shared it between a few people; describes a German woman who was married to a wealthy Jewish man and was interned in the camp with her children; says the German woman was placed in a barracks with herself (Krusińska) and that her children were put with other children in the so-called “siatki” (translates to “grids,” but is a probable reference to barracks according to the translator); talks about the children with great sadness recalling that they were hungry and always asked for food; states that whenever the Germans were not looking, they (the children) were thrown bread; tells how the children’s barracks was located nearby and the German woman saw her children there and cried terribly; remembers that her hair turned gray very quickly; states that the German woman stayed with her for three weeks, and then she went to work in the office; relates that the German woman’s husband and children were taken to the woods and murdered; states that during that time, an SS officer named **Rudi** was the camp commander; also remembers a Governor **Franz** and a German named **Haman**; does not remember the rest of the names; states that their headquarters were located in a pavilion.

[01:] 27:03:05 – [01:] 30:46:18
27:07 – 30:46

She talks about the creation of a Jewish theater in the camp; says one day they were at roll call and were told to go to see the performance; reports that all the actresses and actors were

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Jewish; recalls that they were wonderful, beautiful, and very talented artists; states that the performance lasted until dark, calling it a magnificent spectacle before death; describes how the Germans picked out four beautiful women and took them somewhere; states that she learned later (from other Polish prisoners who witnessed what happened) that these women were taken into the Germans' pavilion where they were asked to strip; says she was told that three of them took off their clothes but not the fourth; says they were taken to the main road by the main entrance to the barracks and the Germans put them next to the gallows and threatened to hang them; states that from there, they were taken somewhere else and speculates that they were murdered; reports that the rest of the artists were also murdered.

[01:] 30:46:19 – [01:] 36:06:05
30:47 – 36:04

Krusińska describes a Jewish man who escaped from the camp in Szebnie; says she knew him because she often gave him food, such as bread or (sometimes) chicken; reports that during a transport to the woods, he jumped out of the truck, hid between the trees, and escaped to the nearby village; says that before his escape, he had prepared a number for himself (the same kind of number that Polish prisoners had), then claimed to be Polish, and managed to go to work in Germany; recalls that after the liberation, she met him by chance in **Sosnowiec** and that he recognized her and was very happy to see her.

Box 1, Tape 2

[02:] 00:54:24 – [02:] 02:38:12
00:00 – 02:39

She gives more details on how she met this Jewish man who escaped from Szebnie; says he worked as a tailor, so they had lots of sewing machines in their barracks; says that because she knew how to sew she used to come to their barracks to repair some of her clothes; reports that she would always bring some food for him and smuggled in some bread or chicken; recalls that one time, she was sewing and two Germans came in, but fortunately they did not notice her; states that she would have been killed if they had seen her, because nobody was allowed in the Jewish barracks.

[02:] 02:38:13 – [02:] 08:15:13
02:40 – 08:14

Krusińska comments that she did not work at the camp in Szebnie; states that she lived from one roll call to the next; mentions that the Red Cross gave each prisoner a slice of bread, some butter, marmalade, and a cup of black coffee each day for breakfast; states that they also were given hot meals made of horse meat stew (horses were brought directly from the front), with some barley and potatoes on top; says that she refused to eat it for about two months but lost a lot of weight so she finally started eating it; claims that a lot of people got sick from it; added that those people who suffered from hoof and mouth disease were poisoned and then placed in a special container and taken somewhere; says that many people at the Szebnie camp came from **Harklowa**, including many priests, nuns, and Polish intellectuals; remembers that Mr. **Piasecki**, the owner of the chocolate factory in Krakow,

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was placed in the Szebnie camp with his entire family; recalls that there were many Gypsies who were treated horribly by the Germans and a large group of mentally ill people.

[02:] 08:15:14 – [02:] 14:52:17
08:15 – 14:52

She returns to the subject of her time in the Krosno prison; mentions again that one group was taken to the camp in Szebnie and the other to Oświęcim (Auschwitz); recalls that it was a large group of males, mainly resistance members and officers; also talks about four Polish aviators who were brought to the camp in Szebnie; states that they had been in Zakopane where two of the locals had been helping them to cross the border to Hungary when they were caught by the Germans; remembers the day that they came to Szebnie; claims that one of them was Stanisław Skarżyński (note: Skarżyński completed a transatlantic solo flight in 1933, but apparently died in a bombing mission on June 26, 1942); says the Gestapo came and spoke with him in German and he was translating everything into Polish; says the Gestapo said they came for the Poles because they are the worst pigs; recalls a woman who was a doctor from Warsaw and was married to a general who was captured by the Germans but was writing her letters from **Auflag**; says the woman always used to go to buy medicine from the pharmacy in Jasło and that she was supervised by one of the Germans; recalls that one day when they went to Jasło, she walked into the pharmacy and never came back; states that she arranged a meeting with her husband and they escaped; recalls that when the officer came back to the camp without her, the Germans were furious and killed a lot of people; recalls that every tenth prisoner was shot; states that on that day Stanisław Skarżyński was beaten.

[02:] 14:52:18 – [02:] 24:18:14
14:53 – 24:19

Krusińska says that in Borysław (where she was born) there were many Jews before the war; mentions she was too small to know them, but remembers buying some candy from them; recalls that as a ten-year-old girl, she moved in with her uncle in Krosno, where she grew up; states that her uncle was a policeman before the war started; adds that her mother died when she was ten, and her father died from a heart attack shortly thereafter; talks about her collaboration with the AK; states that she lived in Krosno with her younger sister, **Marysia**, and one day they took a train to **Sokolow** to visit a friend; says the road led through **Rzeszów**, **Kamień**, and **Gorno**; mentions that they stopped in **Kamień**, talked to some people, and after a while began to sell fabrics to the locals; describes how they expanded their business also to **Gorno** where members of the AK were located; states that they were always in need of Polish **eagles** and **general stripes** [reference unclear]; tells how she started delivering whatever they needed; says that this is how her collaboration with the AK began; mentions that she worked for them for about a year and a half until someone must have betrayed her; says during that time, they were renting a room from an older woman when one day, she saw a bag of Polish eagles sitting on a table; says the woman yelled, and she [Krusińska] grabbed the bag and hid it; claims that Mr. Krusińska was afraid of getting in trouble but it never stopped them from collaborating with the AK; remembers that one time while staying in **Kamień** they wanted to buy some fresh bread, and someone recommended a place; says it was already dark when they got there so the woman asked them to stay for the night and wait for her to bake the bread in the morning; recalls that she and her sister slept in the attic and that they heard a loud noise and people downstairs; states that they were in the National Armed Forces, “Narodowe Siły Zbrojne,” (NSZ); says there were three resistance units: NSZ,

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AK, and the Communist organization; speculates that they would have likely been killed for collaborating with the AK; recalls that after that incident, they stopped going to Kamien and Gorna; speculates that they must have been watched by somebody and were betrayed, because she was arrested; says her sister was not home when they came to arrest her.