

ŚWIETLICKA, Anna
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0136

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Anna Świetlicka (née Lysakowska), born on July 25, 1928, in Piaski, describes her observations on the life of Piaski Jews and their murder by the Germans as seen through the eyes of a twelve-year-old Polish girl.

[01:] 01:15:00 – [01:] 11:04:59

Świetlicka states that the population of Piaski before the war was 5,000 Jews and 2,000 Poles; comments on the town being bombed a few times between the beginning of September and September 17, 1939; discusses the German occupation of Piaski from September 17, 1939, on; comments on witnessing actions by the punishment company "Strafkommando," "Kompania Karna," (SK); describes these actions, which consisted of punishing Jews by beating them, breaking up their stores, pulling them by their beards and cutting their beards off; discusses the Germans forcing Jews to work on useless tasks, like passing stones from one side to the other just to wear them out; discusses the Jews being forced to wear armbands with yellow stars on a white background from 1939 on; talks about the establishment of the ghetto in a part of the town in 1940; comments on the evacuation of the Poles living in that part of the city to make room for Jews; discusses the Jews who lived outside the ghetto area being forced to abandon their homes and move into the ghetto; remembers her two neighbors, the **Akersztajn** and **Pogoda** families, who moved into the ghetto; comments on these families' houses, which were taken over by Poles; discusses the ghetto being surrounded by a 7 ft. high wooden fence topped with barbed wire; talks about the Gestapo taking over a house on **Lubelski** Street, which had a balcony from which they could look over into the ghetto; comments on the ghetto being closed and guarded by the uniformed Jewish Police, which had rubber truncheons; discusses the Jewish Police taking orders from the Germans; talks about the Jewish Police organizing work details and collecting "contributions" for the Germans; comments on the Germans dealing with the Jews through their local Jewish authority or "Kehila"; remembers witnessing the deportation of Jews from the ghetto; discusses Jews from countries like Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria being brought into the ghetto and being told that they would have good living conditions; mentions one Jewish policeman who used to visit her house and talked about Jews being moved out by trucks; remembers seeing Jews being taken away on horse-drawn wagons and Jews (especially old people, women, and children) walking by foot to the train station in **Biskupiec**; talks about her grandfather who was mistakenly picked up on the road and placed into a truck full of Jews; says that he was released after being properly identified.

[01:] 11:05:00 – [01:] 22:59:59

She witnessed from a distance the transportation of Jews from the ghetto; comments on the Germans not allowing Poles to approach; describes that in Piaski, there were two ghettos, a large one and a smaller one; discusses the lack of water in the small ghetto due to the damaged well; talks about a Jew from Czechoslovakia who was brought in to repair the well, but did not succeed; comments on the Jews from the small ghetto being allowed to go to the larger ghetto to get water or visit families twice in a 24-hour period; discusses the visits being controlled by the Jewish police; comments on the Jew from Czechoslovakia who wrote a book in German titled *The One Who Survived*; says that one chapter of the

book describes the well problem in the small ghetto; explains that the Jewish policeman who used to visit her house wanted her family to save him, which could not be done, because one of the rooms in the house was taken by the Germans, and the Gestapo was looking for her brother who was in hiding; discusses the Jewish policeman giving his elderly mother some **Luminal** to save her from being deported; mentions that the mother died and the policeman disappeared after the liquidation of the ghetto; remembers witnessing how Polish firemen were forced to dig graves in the Jewish cemetery on November 3; comments on Jews being rushed to the cemetery and forced to completely undress; discusses the Jews being forced onto wooden planks and executed; says that the Jews fell into the graves; remembers seeing women and children on **Lubelski** Street being marched to the cemetery, and the children still holding toys and dolls; says that the killed and wounded were falling into the graves; says that she heard from others that the earth was still moving the day after the execution; discusses the time after the liquidation of the ghetto, in which they were still catching Jews who were hiding out in the area; talks about witnessing the execution of two Jewish men who tried to escape from the road to the cemetery; says one of them was shot by the Lithuanians who wore black uniforms; comments on the Lithuanians who worked in Majdanek and used to show up whenever there was an operation to catch and kill Jews.

[01:] 23:00:00 – [01:] 36:00:00

She comments on the time after the liquidation of the ghetto, in which the Germans collected many things left by the Jews; discusses the Germans storing these items in the synagogue and shipping them somewhere later; comments on her visiting the ghetto after the liquidation and seeing dead bodies lying around; talks about her father finding a dead child, that was suffocated and left lying in a bed for many days, in the house owned by her grandfather; talks about the bombing of the ghetto by the Soviet Air Force before the end of the war ended; focuses on the experiences of a Jew named **Joseph Chonig** [**Honig**; **Honik**; **Hönig**] who was the only Jew from Piaski who survived the war; says that **Chonig** lived in the ghetto with his family; talks about his sister and niece who were shot and their bodies buried in one of the mass graves in the Jewish cemetery; comments on **Chonig**, his mother, and another sister being sent to the Belżec death camp; describes that in Belżec, the Jews who were selected each day to be gassed, had to remove their clothing and were sent into the gas chambers under the pretext that these were showers; discusses their bodies being thrown into pits that were filled with lime; discusses **Chonig** telling her that he was collecting the victims' clothes, which were then shipped to a warehouse in Lublin; says that **Chonig** smuggled himself out of the Belżec camp in one of these shipments and escaped into the **Mogilewski** [**Molgiewski**; **Molgiewski**] forest on the way to Lublin; says that he ended up with the partisans and that he found his father and a brother in the partisan group; reports that there was also a couple named **Niesman** from Piaski; says that after the war, the brother became a member of the Polish police, "Milicja Obywatelska," (MO); comments on **Chonig's** father and brother being shot to death soon after the war near the police station; mentions that there were three mass graves in the Jewish cemetery in Piaski.

Box 1, Tape 2

[02:] 01:10:00 – [02:] 13:57:00

She mentions a family by the name of **Niesman** from Piaski that left two of their baby girls with two Polish families; comments on one of the farmers taking the one-and-a-half-year-old girl and keeping her for twenty-two months; says that after the war, the girl's parents returned and wanted to retrieve the baby, but the baby did not want to go to her real parents and remained with the Polish family; discusses the younger girl who was an infant and left with a childless family in **Byszczejowice**; says that the family was able to eventually retrieve the baby and left the area; comments on **Chonig's** whereabouts, which she

heard directly from him; says that he lived in Lublin after the war, but came a few times to talk to her and her husband; talks about a Jewish wife of a German officer who was sent to Piaski in summer of 1940 with her son called **Ginte [Günter; Günther]**; discusses their being from southern Germany; comments on the officer visiting the woman, but not being able to save her or her son; assumes that they perished in the ghetto; mentions that the German woman also had an older son who lived in Stettin (Szczecin); discusses the woman corresponding with him and receiving care packages from him; Świetlicka digresses and mentions that a few years earlier (before this interview) a group of German tourists visited Piaski where her husband was a tour guide; says that the tourists mentioned a book published in Germany titled *Letters from Piaski*, which is a collection of letters written by German Jews from the Piaski ghetto to their relatives in Germany; comments on approximately 10,000 German Jews being sent to the Piaski ghetto in 1940 and 1941; discusses her daughter who went to Germany to get this book and who is planning to translate it into Polish; mentions the case of a German Jewish man who was in the ghetto and whose German wife came to Poland and lived outside the ghetto; mentions the wife's 17-year-old son who used to be sent to work in **Sawin**; discusses the woman trying to have her son released after her husband died; talks about the mother and the son being brought to Lublin; comments on their disappearance; says that, apparently the woman's mother was writing to German authorities in Lublin inquiring about the fate of her daughter and her grandson to no avail; says that these letters are part of the book *Letters from Piaski*; says that the book also contains letters that show the tense relationship between German and Polish Jews in the ghetto.

Time coded notes provided by Sam Ponczak