

WIŚNIEWSKA, Julia
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0141

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Julia Wiśniowska, born in 1929, and a native of Mościce (near Tarnów), recalls memories of several events that took place in 1940 and 1942. She describes witnessing the murders of young children by the Germans, including a specific instance in which a German guard murders a crying infant. She discusses and describes the local Jewish ghetto and the Jewish mass-murder site, and shares what she learned about the execution site from eyewitnesses.

[01:] 01:08:00 – 11:36:25
00:00 – 10:28

Wiśniowska begins by explaining she was born in 1929 in Mościce, a town about five kilometers from Tarnów; notes that several years ago [*prior to this interview*] she wrote some of her wartime (and occupation period) memories to share with her grandchildren; says that as a girl, before the war, she would accompany her mother to shop in stores owned by Jews in Tarnów; recalls that within a month after the occupation, the local Jews had to wear blue stars with a white background as identifiers and that stores owned by Jews were marked with a white star; says her mother was in a store one time and some Germans came inside, asked the customers to leave, and carried all the merchandise out to a car outside; remembers witnessing a horrible event in Tarnów in either 1940 or 1941: while she was shopping with her mother in the market square (Rynek Główny), they saw a column of Jewish women laborers coming out of the ghetto; remembers several women carrying children too young to be left behind on their own; remembers one of the infants crying and his mother being unable to calm it; says a German guard became angered, ran up to the woman, grabbed the baby, ran with it to the City Hall wall, and slammed the baby's head against the stone wall, killing it; says he then threw back the dead and bloody infant to the woman who passed out and was lying on a sidewalk; recalls standing very near the site of this event and was shocked by it and remembers it very vividly; says she does not know what happened afterward, since her mother was too afraid to stay there any longer, and so they both left.

[01:] 11:37:00 – [01:] 21:47:25
10:29 – 20:38

Wiśniowska talks about an event that took place after the German-Russian war broke out: says a woman, known as the widow of a Polish Army major, came to town; mentions it was known that she also lost her child and her fortune; says she seemed well off, but was alone and behaved

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strangely, at times repeating the same sentence, “stone over stone and stone on top of it” to herself over and over again; says that in 1943 she came to the local priest asking him to issue a duplicate of her birth certificate, since hers was old and worn; says her name was **Jarovitz**; says the priest copied her certificate; says that soon after the Gestapo detained **Jarovitz** and when the new form of the birth certificate was found, she was taken to the local woods (as told to Wiśniowska by some of the young men in the resistance) and executed there; recalls hearing that the reason for the murder was because **Jarovitz** was of Jewish descent; says the next day the Germans arrested the priest, claiming that he was hiding a Jew, and he spent two months in the Tarnów prison, was later sent to Auschwitz, and then to Dachau; notes that he survived the war; says she did not witness the Tarnów ghetto liquidation, but remembers well what the ghetto looked like: the wall around it was covered with a thick layer of broken glass and was surrounded by several layers of barbwire; notes that she learned that at the time of the mass execution, blood was flowing in the sewage; notes that to save on bullets, smashing children’s heads against a stonewall or sidewalk was a regular way of killing them; shows the work written by an investigator from Tarnów, **Alexandra Pietrzyk**, that focuses on liquidation of Tarnów’s Jews, including the names of people that helped the Jews.

[01:] 21:48:00 – [01:] 36:04:25
20:39 – 35:02

Wiśniowska tells about an area called “**Buczyna**” (beechwoods); says that while now it is a forest bordering a cemetery and surrounded by residential area, during the war it was surrounded by fields belonging to the Polish earl, **Hrabiego Franciszka Grzaby**; says the area was uninhabited at the time, which is presumably why it was used as by the Germans; says the events she speaks of occurred between June 11 and 18, 1942; remembers that the days were very hot, and her family could hear shots from the direction of Zglobice, the town in which her aunt and grandfather lived; remembers visiting her aunt with her younger brother so they took a shortcut through **Buczyna** and saw a ramp and two Germans with machine guns; says she was scared and kept looking at the guns rather than where she was walking, and subsequently stumbled and fell; says the German soldiers laughed loudly, and noticed only then that she had stumbled over a crutch; said she looked around noticed more crutches, walking sticks, glasses, and wigs on the ground; remembers vividly the wind blowing around large white pages with black Hebrew writing; says that as she and her brother stood there, a column of large trucks arrived and that in one of them, through an opening, she saw a middle-aged woman who looked out and seeing the cemetery, the forest, and the objects scattered on the ground started to scream, took off her wig and threw it onto the ground; says the trucks turned onto the road toward **Buczyna**; says she and her brother turned around to walk back, and they could hear shots; recalls that after the war, she taught a student who lived in the house near the execution site and that he and his brother watched the executions—they saw people putting away their luggage under one tree, getting undressed under another, and there were long, deep ditches, dug earlier, along which the people had to line up.

Box 1, Tape 2

[02:] 01:12:00 – [02:] 10:05:25
00:00 – 8:53

Wiśniowska continues the story told to her by her student who witnessed the executions: he said that he and his brother observed some people jumping into the ditches before the shooting begun; she guesses that these people either fainted or hoped to escape after the shooting; says she heard, after the war, from a classmate, that he witnessed a Polish prisoner escape into thick bushes during the shooting, and he said the Germans kept shooting at the prisoner, but does not know if he survived; mentions that in February (before the massacre in June 1942), there was a typhus epidemic in Tarnów; recalls that after the massacre in June there was a very strong odor of rotting bodies; says her house was three kilometers away from the cemetery and because of the odor they could not keep windows open; says the Germans were worried a new, larger epidemic would occur so they brought lime and soil to cover the bodies; estimates the soil added an additional meter of height to the covered bodies; says several months later when walking with her aunt she saw the covered ditches which were still full of brown “goo,” with bursting bubbles; recalls beech tree trunks covered with human hair, pieces of dry skin, dry blood, and dry pieces of brain; says that 800 Jewish children, who are now thought to be buried there, were all killed by having their heads crushed against beech tree trunks; says it was a horrible sight and she would avoid going near that area.

[02:] 10:06:00 – [02:] 22:24:25
8:54 – 21:11

[This last part of the DVD has multiple disruptions, and the audio is of poor quality.]

Wiśniowska says that in September 1945, a ceremony opening the cemetery was held; says that at the time, human hair and remnants of human tissue were still visible, as if growing from the tree trunks (three years after these events); says the terrain was cleaned, the beech trees were cut and the place was turned into a proper cemetery, where Jewish graves were on one side and Polish on the other; credits the local priest (**Stanisława Indyka**) and the owner of the land, earl **Hrabiego Franciszka Grzaby** (who was in the resistance during the war), for the transfer of the land to serve as a cemetery; describes a monument that was erected to commemorate the dead; says that since people of different religions are buried there, their religious associations were not marked; says that only a torch with a flame and two swords symbolizing the defeat of fascism are there; says that during the war there was a jail in Tarnów where the Germans kept political prisoners from the whole General Gouvernement; shows a newspaper from that time (September 1945) showing the opening ceremony of the cemetery, in an article titled “Nieznane Moscice”; remembers a lot of people coming for the ceremony; says the area is now a national memorial; estimates that about 6,000 people are buried there.