

NOWACKI, Józef
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0211

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Józef Nowacki, born on February 9, 1929, talks about his wartime experiences in his native town of Koźminek and, subsequently, in the village of Smółki. He describes the ghetto in Koźminek and the process of gassing people in "gas vans," which were used against the Jewish population. In addition, he discusses the escape of some Jews from the ghetto and comments on how he helped those Jews flee the city.

[01:] 00:20:00 – [01:] 08:20:59

He talks about Jewish life in Koźminek before the war; comments on the local Jews' main professions in commerce and trade; discusses the relationship between the different ethnic groups; remembers his neighbor, a rabbi, who was a friend of his father's; talks about the professions of the rabbi and his father; comments on their being violinists in different bands.

[01:] 08:21:00 – [01:] 16:26:59

He describes the ghetto in Koźminek, which was surrounded by barbed wire; says that there was only one street to enter and exit the ghetto; comments on the ghetto being overpopulated and thousands of people living in the streets; comments on the origins of the non-Jewish inmates as being Warta, Sieradz, Błaszki, and **Staniszyn**; says that there was a meadow adjacent to the ghetto, which was crossed by a small river; describes how he helped a woman from Poland, the wife of the rabbi of **Chocz**, to flee the ghetto along with her six children; says that the woman and her children fled by crossing the river; comments on his not having been familiar with the area and leading the family to **Murawy** through Emilianów; discusses the woman and her children being helped to go to **Chocz** by another Pole; talks about their survival and later immigration to Australia; comments on his still being in touch with this family; mentions the rabbi of **Chocz** being killed during the war; says that he does not know any details about the killing of the rabbi; comments on the gassings in the ghetto; remembers people being led on three to four vans by eight to fifteen Jewish policemen who were armed with clubs; discusses the sequence of the killings as being children first, followed by women, and then men.

[01:] 16:27:00 – [01:] 24:40:59

He explains that the tailpipe of the cars was directed inwards to the vans to suffocate the people during the ride; remembers the screaming which could be heard after the

departure of the cars; says that the vans came from Kalisz; speculates on the origin of the drivers as German or Polish; talks about the daily deportations and the killing of the Jewish policemen who participated in the crimes; discusses the evacuation of the ghetto by the German policemen **Lodziak**, **Sommer [Summer]**, **Othe**, **Bymś** and some German civilians from the SA; comments on his witnessing the escape of inmates; says that some of his acquaintances, such as the **Bruks [Brux]** brothers, managed to survive the war.

[01:] 24:41:00 – [01:] 34:00:59

He explains that the vans drove in the direction of Kalisz; comments on the bodies of the murdered people being found only after the war in a forest close to Kalisz; assumes that the local population knew of the gassings; comments on his accompanying three Jewish girls who had fled the ghetto, to Opatówek; comments on their surviving the war; discusses his being arrested at the age of 14 along with other young people; discusses being taken to Kalisz; comments on their escape from Kalisz; discusses his father who took him to Smółki to stay at his uncle's farm until the end of the war; remembers a 9- or 10-year-old Jewish girl called **Marysia** who was brought in by the neighbor **Jaśkiewicz** and also stayed at his uncle's house; assumes that the uncle received money for hiding the girl; comments on the girl's Catholic education and her official status as a relative of the family; says that **Bruks** and **Wolek** picked up **Marysia** after the war; says that **Marysia** joined a Catholic convent in Wrocław (Breslau).

[01:] 34:01:00 – [01:] 42:48:00

He comments on cases of neighbors reporting people; speculates on his own being arrested that might have been caused by a neighbor; remembers the Jewish cemetery and the synagogue in Koźminek; mentions that a big part of the cemetery was destroyed by the Germans during the war and used as a training area for the soldiers; says that the Polish population took sand from the former cemetery and sold it as construction material.