

RUTKOWSKA, Maria
Polish Witness to the Holocaust
Polish
RG-50.488*0231

Maria Rutkowska, born on **April 30th, 1921**, in **Wysokie Male**, talks about the situation in her village during the war. At the beginning, she talks about the Jews, who lived there before the war. She gives some names. She mentions some Jew, named **Szlama**, and talks about his family. Further, she talks about some Jewish families, who were murdered while hiding in the corn fields. She also mentions some Jewish woman, who was killed by Polish partisans. She describes Polish partisans, and bandits, who were active in the village during the war. In the end, she tells a story about some Jewish girl, and also mentions some Jews, who visited the village after the war.

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[01]:0034:05 – [01]:21:31:01
00:32 – 22:20

[01]:00:34:05 – [01]:04:47:04
00:32 – 04:55

Q: I would like to ask you to introduce yourself, and tell us when you were born.

A: I was born in [19]21, last day of April.

Q: April 30th, right?

A: 30th of April.

Q: What is your name?

A: Now? Rutkowska Maria.

Q: What about your maiden name?

A: **Marianna Skobel.**

Q: And you were born here, in this village, that is?

A: Wysokie Male

Q: Where did you live before and during the war?

A: Here, as well.

Q: Same village, right?

A: Yes, same one.

Q: Did any Jewish live here before the war?

A: There was one, he owned a store, and his name was **Szlama**.

Q: Szlama. So, he was the only Jew?

A: He lived here with his family.

Q: Do you remember anyone of his family?

A: There was another family in **Kolonia**, in **Wysockie**, named _____

Q: But, here in the village. There was only one Jewish family.

A: Yes. Just one Jewish family.

Q: What happened with that family during the war?

A: I don't know. There were so many Jews in **Pogolia**, there were shoemakers, and tailors. Others traded horses. Later, after the Jews had been taken, people in the village were wondering who will be trading in Poland now? And this our Szlama – they were taken up the hill – or somewhere else, and apparently they were beaten.

Q: Szlama was beaten?

A: Szlama, as well as other Jews.

Q: All of them, or just men?

A: Just men were taken.

Q: Men were taken?

A: Yes.

Q: Up the hill?

A: Some hills, near **Klimontowo**.

Q: Who was beating them?

A: The **Germans**, I suppose. How can I know? The Germans were here at that time.

Q: Were they beating the Jews for any reason?

A: They organized something – how do you call it, I don't know? They took the Jews, and then they let them go. Szlama told my husband that he would rather see a devil, than one German.

Q: So, Szlama was also beaten?

A: Yes, he was.

Q: Did you hear him talking about it?

A: He spoke with my husband.

Q: With your husband?

A: And then, he was taken, and all of them were taken somewhere.

Q: Who took them?

A: Who? The Germans, I suppose, because they were taken to **Oswiecim**, and they were not here anymore.

Q: Where they taken straight to Oswiecim, or somewhere else at first?

A: No. Somewhere, somewhere, somewhere, I guess. I can't –

Q: Where were the Jews transported from here?

A: They had some..., I don't remember how it's called. Later, the Jews were burnt in the gas chambers.

Q: So, Szlama's family was transported from here, right?

A: Yes. They were taken, and that was the last time I saw them.

Q: I'm sorry. Let's stop for a second..

A: - And people were wondering, who was going to trade in the village.

Q: After the Jews were taken, right?

A: Yes. Some Jewish sewed a coat for me. There used to be tailors, and shoemakers. The Jews also traded horses, they were buying orchards. My father had orchards, and the Jews were rushing, who was going to buy from him first. Either the Jews from **Staszow**, or... They were buying fruit from my father.

Q: What do you mean, that they were buying orchards?

A: I mean..

Q: You mean, they were buying the fruit ?

A: Yes. Later, when the fruit was ripe, they were selling it in town.

Q: Were they trading during the war?

A: No. Not during the war.

[01]:04:48:19 – [01]:06:34:15
04:56 – 06:47

Q: After the Szlama's family had been taken, were there any other Jews left in the village.

A: No. Nobody was left.

Q: Where any Jews hiding around here?

A: Some villagers saw the Jews hiding in the fields during harvest. That's all I know. And, I don't know..

Q; It was in the summer, right?

A. Yes. In the summer.

Q: Do you remember what year that was, In the summer?

A; What year were the Germans here? I don't remember. No. I don't remember.

Q: What happened to those Jews? Who were they?

A: Some people we knew. They were from Pogolia. They were hiding with their children in the fields. I was thinking to myself – Mother of God- poor little child. It was raining many times while they were hiding in the fields.

Q: So, you knew those Jews from Pogolia?

A: I knew them by sight. They used to buy fruit, and rye from us. Just some people I knew.

Q: Did any of the Jews, who were hiding in the fields, ever come by to your property?

A: No. Never. They knew, we would not be able to help them. Many of us wanted to help them, but everyone was terrified. We were scared for our lives, and didn't want to die, or be transported somewhere. When I was young we had this house (she points with her hand), and then when I got married we had a wooden house connected to a barn, so we even didn't have enough room to help anyone. Nobody kept any Jews here.

[01]:06:34:18 – [01]:08:41:03
06:47 – 08:58

Q: Did they ever come here to ask for food?

A: No. Not really. Well, there was some Jewish woman, who came by with her daughter, and **ca** – (unfinished came)

Q: Wait. Wait. Let's talk about this in a second, ok..?

A: So, she came in with her daughter. She stayed for dinner, and then she spend with us some time, it was Sunday. I could tell, she wanted to sleep over, but my mother- in law was there too, so I told her that we would love to have her over, but were scared, and it was forbidden. So, she left, and we haven't seen her since.

Q: So, it was a Jewish woman, right?

A: Yes. With her little girl.

Q: So, she must have been hiding, or living around here?

A: Yeah. Somewhere. I guess.

Q: What happened to her, and her daughter? Do you know anything?

A: This woman came here for dinner in the summer, and she was murdered in the winter. I didn't know anything about it, I found out later. They took her, they walked her, I Suppose. We owe a property up there, there are bushes around. She was murdered there, and they covered her dead body with snow. Nobody knew about it. Later, when the sun came up, and people went to work in the field, somebody saw her body. The mayor came to us, to tell us about the dead body discovered in our field. The body was there from winter to spring, so we could easily identify who it was.

Q: Did you see her? Did you recognize her?

A: I didn't see her.

Q: So, how do you know it was her?

A: My husband buried her body.

Q: Your husband did?

A: Not by himself. He wasn't able to do it by himself.

[01]:08:42:15 – [01]:13:43:24
09:00 – 14:14

Q: You said, they took her and killed her. Who took her and murdered her?

A: Well, some.. Do you think I know who came for her at night? Some bandits, partisans, or who knows who they were.

Q: Do you remember, what kind of partisans they could have been?

A: Just, some partisans, thieves – because they came here once, and wanted guns from us- my father in law was alive at that time – if not, they were going to kill us. We didn't have any guns, so they put us into a pantry – my daughter was sleeping in a crib - and they were searching for guns, but they didn't find anything. We had a whole pig upstairs – and there – we didn't have a fridge yet, so we kept some sausage, and had one liter of vodka. They took it all, and left.

Q: Were they Polish?

A: Do you think that I know who they were? It was at night.

Q: But, they spoke Polish with you, right?

A: Yes, Polish.

Q: So, they were Polish.

A: Yes. So, when the others came, they robbed us. They took some of my husband's clothes, they stole his three suits, and yeah... - first, the Germans gave us some points, so we could buy vodka, or some thong. Then, we would go to Staszow to buy some thong, and also some fabric for bedding, and then I had someone to sew it for me.

Q: Did the partisans come here for any other reasons ?

A: No, not really. They took my husband to the river a few times. Also, one time, they rode our horses all day, and the horses were exhausted when they dropped them off.

Q: Did they search for Jews here?

A: No. Not at our house. No.

Q: Do you recall any situation, where they searched for Jews at your house?

A: Maybe, at that time that my brothers were beaten, when they came ?

Q: Why don't you tell me about it.

A: My mom went to a tailor, and my father went with her, because it was already dark, and she was scared to go by herself. Tailor's house was there, at the end. And those two boys stayed at home. They were in 4th, or 5th grade at the time. Those people came in, and asked them to show them where the Jews were hiding. The boys just opened their eyes in amazement, and said that nobody was hiding there. They were beaten. They were put into two separate rooms, and beaten.

Q: They were beaten by those partisans?

A: I guess... Do you think, that I know who it was?, or what it was, and what they were worth?

Q: So, what happened next? Your brothers were beaten, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: What happened next?

A: And then, they asked my brother. – My older brother was beaten very hard. – “ Maybe, some Jews are hiding at your brother's in law?”, they asked. He told him to go and see for himself. And they went to his house.

Q: Brother – in law, you mean your husband, right?

A: Yes. No... My brother said that. He said that he didn't know if his brother –in law had any Jews at his house. They went to his house, and he was in bed, they hit him in the face. But then, the grandmother – who was alive at that time – grabbed a chair, and asked them: “ This is my only child, and you came to kill him at night” ? They stayed a little longer, and then left.

Q: So, they were looking for Jews at your house, right?

A: Yeah. First, they wanted the guns from us, and then they searched for Jews. Nobody ever kept any Jews at our house. I only saw this one Jewish woman, who came here. As Catholics, we gave her food, and then she had to go, because everyone was scared. That's all we had to do with Jews.

[01]:13:44:18 – [01]:17:18:05

14:15 – 17:57

Q: Let me ask you this, you said that this Jewish woman, who was murdered by the bandits, or partisans, had a daughter?

A: Her daughter was with her all the time. Even, then when they came for her. And this girl, - somebody took care of her. This lady, who took care of her was named, - well, she was **Tomala's** sister.

Q: So this girl survived?

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A: Yes. She survived. I remember one situation. I was breastfeeding my baby, when suddenly, this girl run through the open door. She hid behind my wardrobe, and then she run towards me, and (she imitates how the girl grabbed her sweater)- she was yelling: “ Please, you need to save my mother, somebody wants to take her”. It was somebody, who carried a scythe, and just wanted to scare the girl. He said he was going to kill her. – There are some woods, near Pogolia, where some other girl was killed. So that’s why, she was so scared.

Q: So, that was her sister, her daughter, who was..?

A: One girl was killed there already.

Q: So she was scared, and what happened next, what did this person with a scythe do?

A: He just wanted to scare them, and that’s it. Why would he do that? How can I know what his intentions were?

Q: But, he didn’t kill her, this woman?

A: No. The girl was sleeping, while her mother was taken at night. I think. So, this woman, **Toamla’s** sister, named **Mazurkiewicz** took care of her. This lady died last week, I went to her funeral. She was my age. She raised this Jewish girl, and even baptized her.

Q: So, she was hiding this girl during the entire war, right?

A: Yes.

Q: What happened to this child, after the war?

A: I don’t know. Some official found out about her, and took her. She wasn’t a child anymore, she was a young girl. She was taken to **England**, I guess.

Q: Did they stay in touch, after that?

A: I am not sure – I guess, but I don’t know.

Q: Did this girl, did she come here as a grown woman?

A: Yes. Some Jews came here in a car. She wanted to take her mother’s body.

Q: Her mother’s body?

A: Yes. My husband wasn’t home, when they came, so they waited for him to come back. Then, he showed them where her body was buried. They went there, and dug. We have a piece of land there, by those bushes. I am not sure, if he remembered where her body was buried, because they never found her bones. They filled some containers with soil, and took them back to Warsaw. When they came here for the first time, they prayed, and

we had already planted some potatoes there. They planted lots of flowers there, and all of the Jews prayed. That's all I know.

[01]:17:19:06 – [01]:21:31:01
17:58 – 22:20

Q: Let's go back for a second to war times. You said that during the war, there were some Jewish families hiding in the fields, in the summer?

A: Yes. That's right.

Q: What happened with them?

A: So, they were saying: people went to work in the field in the morning, and they said that all the Jews were murdered, and the young Jewish girls were raped, and then hung up on trees. They were hung in those bushes. I didn't see any of that. That's what people said.

Q: But, who murdered them, and who raped them?

A: Who? Do you think that I know? Do you think they would show their faces, they wore masks so nobody could see them.

Q: Do you think they were Germans, or Poles?

A: From what I heard, they could have been thieves – Poles. They robbed for the money. I think.

Q: So, they killed for the purpose of robbery?

A: - Because, the Germans would kill in a daylight. If they wanted to kill, they would kill even during a day, anytime. That's what I think.

Q: You didn't see their bodies, did you?

A: No. When they killed five of the Russians in our field. - Some German was beaten, and then he got up with his hand up, then the Russians came here, and eight of them were killed. I was walking by (she covers her eyes), and I didn't want to see them. Their lips were very swollen.

Q: Was it here, close from here?

A: Just behind our backyard, behind the road (she points with her hand). I didn't want to see the dead bodies, because I am scared.

Q: In your opinion, Why do you think those Poles killed the Jews? Why did they killed this Jewish woman, and why did they kill those Jews hiding in the fields?

A: Why? It was a punishment from the God. Jews – they are humans too. If the God wanted them to die, he would have taken them, and they would have died. But why, would anyone want to kill them, or to treat them worse than others? That's what I think. But, how can I know what their intentions were?

Q: You mentioned earlier, that maybe they did it for the money?

A: Well, some Jews were wealthy. But there were some poor people as well. Like this one Jew, who worked for us. He watched our orchard, and it was his only one source of income. He had five children, and they were all so very kind. I even learnt some Hebrew from them. I knew how to count, and was able to communicate with them.

Q: Do you speak any Hebrew now?

A: Just a little bit.

Q: Please, say something in Hebrew.

A: I know how to count to ten: **ein, zwei, drei.. zwanzig**. That's twenty, right?

Q: Yes. Do you remember anything else?

A: Yeah, I remember "**pchoj**" (**HEBREW: bread**). Also, "**bochajmy**" (**HEBREW: cow**), and so on. – I attended school at that time, and we were just little girls at that time.

Q: Do you know of any other Jews, who were hiding here, besides those who were killed in the fields, and this Jewish woman?

A: No. I only remember those Jews, who came here.

Q: They came here after the war. But do you remember anyone else, during the war?

A: No.

Q: Have you been in the Ghetto, in Staszow or Pogolia? Have you seen it?

A: No. Never. I haven't seen it.

Q: You have never seen it?

A: No.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much.

[01]:21:31:01

22:20

Koniec wywiadu.

