

OSTASZYK, Irena
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust
Polish
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Irena Ostaszyk was born in Mordy in 1919, where she lived during the war and was living there during the 2005 interview. She says that Jewish population numbered about half of a total Mordy population, 2,000 out of a total 4,000 residents. She also says that before the war there was no indication of any antagonism between the local Jews and the Polish people. Jewish and Polish children attended the same schools together. The local Jews were tradesmen and artisans. She narrates several events from the time of the occupation which she personally witnessed, i.e. how the Jews were evacuated one Saturday morning in August 1942 from the Ghetto. She is a poet, and reads several of her poems which speak of Jews and their fate.

(01)0.30-(01)10.27
00.00-09.57

Irena Ostaszyk was born October 2, 1919 in Mordy. Out of 4,000 of the town residents, 2,000 were Jewish. Polish and Jewish children attended the same school. During the war the Germans established in town a Jewish neighborhood (she says it was not referred to as Ghetto). In addition to the Jewish residents of Mordy, the Germans moved to this neighborhood Jews from surrounding villages. She says that Poles who lost their homes were moving to houses vacated by Jews. The Jews traded their services (tailoring, shoemaking, repairs, etc) to purchase food from Polish population. She says that before the war there was no antagonism toward the Jews in Mordy. She doesn't think that the Jewish neighborhood was surrounded by barb wire, and the Poles could walk in and out freely, without limitations. She herself went there to a dressmaker and shoemaker as well as to a Jewish lady who baked cakes which she in turn was selling in her store. She says that if this situation would continue the Jews could have survived to the end of the war. But they didn't survive since the Germans evacuated them. She remembers the day of the evacuation very well. It was Saturday, a second half of August, 1942. Her store was located at the market square. She and her husband were awoken at 2 past midnight since there was movement at the market. There were Jews being rounded up there; women, men and children. She remembers in the morning talking to her neighbor who was Jewish, and telling her not to worry. She assumed that the event of rounding up the Jews in the market square was temporary (she says that the Germans sometime before rounded up the Poles but later let them return to their homes). However, this time the armed, and in uniforms Germans with dogs surrounded the market. The Poles were not allowed in the vicinity. The day was very hot, she think it was probably 35 degrees Celsius

(01)10:28- (01)21.02
09.57-20.34

She says that the children cried since there were very thirsty and hungry, and that she wanted to help them. At first she put bottles of lemonade from the store in front of the door, and later when she run out of bottles of lemonade she asked her husband to bring a bucket of water. She was attempting to put the bucket in front of the store door when a German hit her in the head. She fell and the water spilled into the ground. Her husband thought that she will be killed. When she regained consciousness and returned to the store she could see how the children gathered the wet sand from the ground and tried to suck the muddy sand. Little later she could see an elderly Jewish man who was running behind the crowd that the Germans were marching out from the market square. Two gendarmes who walked towards him shot him on the spot. She and her husband could see the brain splatter from his head. In the afternoon they could see again how Germans marched large crowd of people. She thinks they were Jews from Łośice, which were about 14 kilometers from Mordy. It was extremely hot and dust from the road make it impossible to see well the passing people. She thinks that they probably walked since early morning. At one point she saw how a man (about 40 years old) who she imagines was very tired set down or may be fell down near the church. A German gendarme walked up to him and shot him on the spot.

(01)21.03-(01)32.02
20.34-31.32

She says that after these events there were no more Jews in Mordy. She with her husband lived in a little house out of town, near the main road. One night somebody knocked on their window. There were two famished Jews, who neither she nor her husband knew. She says that she didn't asked these men who they were or where they were coming from, but they gave them food. The men returned several times, and received food on each visit. When fall arrived the men came to say goodbye, and said they were going through the forest to cross the river Bug, and get to the Russian site. She never saw them again and doesn't know what happened to them. She says that after liberation of Mordy in 1944 several Jewish families returned to Mordy for a brief time. There were a number of young men, and married couples whom she knew from before the war (Furman with his wife, Nechemia (sp?) with his family, and Smolarz with wife). Smolarz's brother served with her husband in the military in 1922. She would see them when they came shopping in her store. She says that the young Jews didn't stay long, and left the town after they sold their families possessions. She never asked any of them how they survived. She says that at that time nobody spoke about it, since people were still afraid and didn't trust each other. There was an empty street in Mordy, named Kozia, where poor Jews used to live, and their small, abandoned houses looked like tombs. She adds that the Jews she knew in Mordy before the war, were quiet, peaceful people, whom she never saw drunk, and who despite the fact that they were merchants, never cheated their customers. While at school, she had a Jewish friend, a young girl about whom she was dreaming after the war. The girl in her dreams wore camp cloth that were in flames.

(01)32.03-(01)39.01
31.33-38.31

For many years after the war she didn't go back to the subject of the war and the Jews. She says that only many years later she started to write about her war experiences. She is a poet and issued 12 volumes of her poetry. They include the poems about the Jews from Mordy. She says that in each volume 3 or 4 poems related to Mordy Jews. Her books can be found in England, USA, and Sweden. She also receives financial support from various organizations. The interviewer asks her if during the war she witnessed additional cases of Jewish prosecution. She tells how one time, when traveling on the train to go to Siedlce, she could see on the ramp a body of a young, naked Jewish woman (she says that the woman was very beautiful), and that next to the body was a pile of rugs. When asked how she knew that the woman was Jewish, her reply is "who else could it be"). She also says that she rescued children from Zamosc, whom the railroad workers brought from a transport to her house. The children were orphans, since their parents were killed in Auschwitz, and their grandmother was an old woman, She also says that she received numerous awards , i.e. "Golden Heart" and that she can show them later. Next question she is asked is whether she can identify where the ghetto was located in Mordy. She says that it was in the Northern part of town, and stretched from half of Kosciuszko street, halves of Żwirki and Wigury streets and half of 11th of November street. She didn't see a barb wire there, and she doesn't think that it was guarded.

(01)39.02- (01)51.15
38.32-50.45

The interviewer asks her to end the interview by reading some of her poems. The first poem she reads is named "From the memories of 1942, August" and is about the Saturday events, the day that the Germans evacuated the Jews of Mordy. She becomes very emotional reading the poem and has to stop. The next poem is named "Memories of Christmas night" and is about the woman who remembers an old Jew, and the poem she reads after that is named "Auschwitz" and is about the Poles murdered in Auschwitz. She says that the Jews were also Poles, since they had on other country than Poland. The poem she reads next is named "Kirkut", and is about a Jewish cemetery. The last poem she reads is "Holy land" and is about the land of Podlasie (the district where Mordy is located) and about suffering of the innocent victims of war. The interviewer thanks her for the interview and for reading her poems. She adds that in her books included are the names of Jews from Mordy, whom she knew personally.